

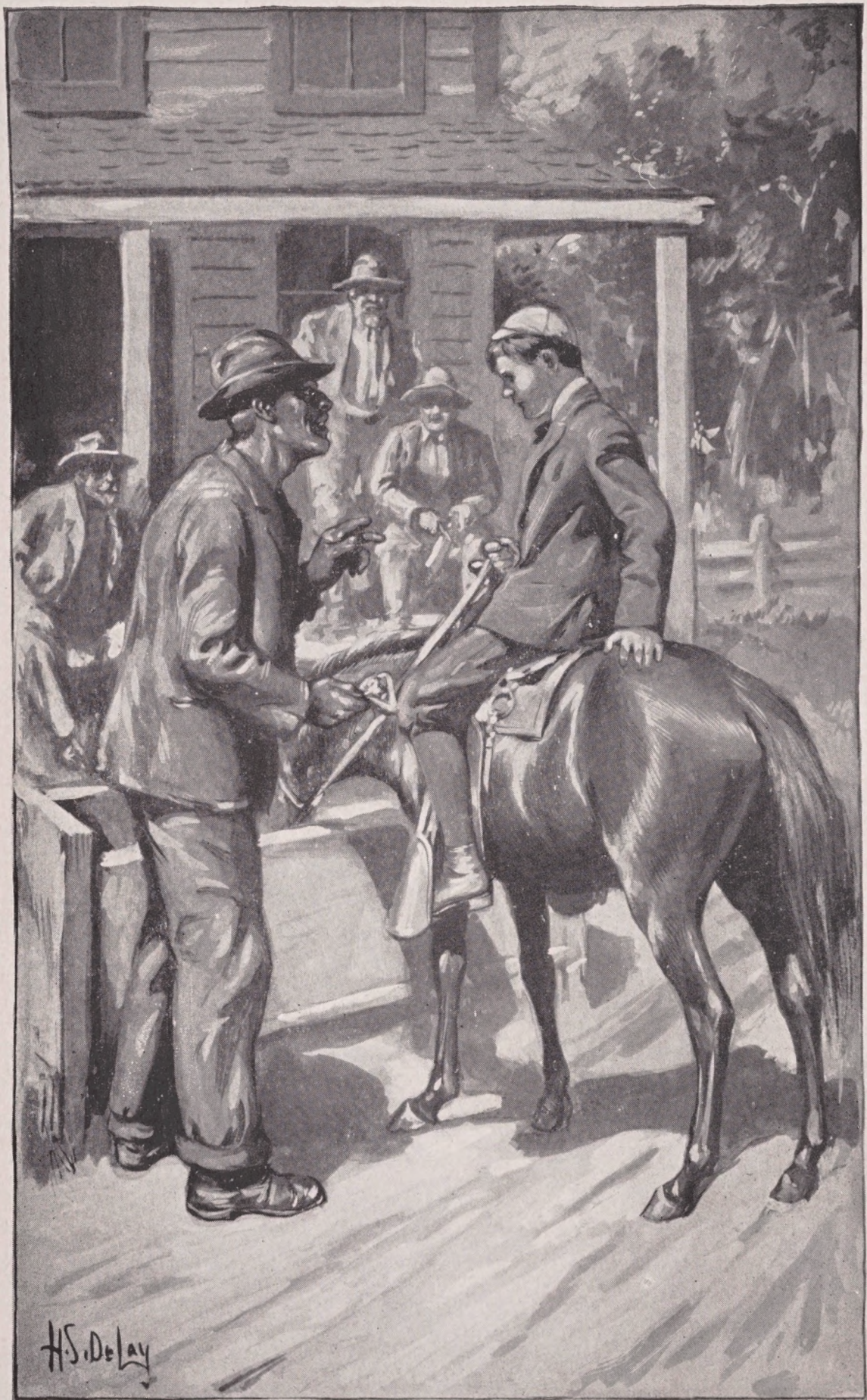


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"I SEEN YOU BEFORE SOMEWHERE, AIN'T I?" [Page 108.]

THE CAVE OF THE BOTTOMLESS POOL

BY

HENRY GARDNER HUNTING

Author of "Witter Whitehead's Own Story"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

H. S. DELAY

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THE CAVE OF THE BOTTOMLESS POOL

CHAPTER I

A PRISONER ESCAPED

IN the story I wrote about the silver robbery at Fleming's store, which happened when I was working there, I told about a policeman named Mr. Benson, who helped to catch the thieves, and who was very good to me. He was promoted to be a captain of police that summer, and I didn't see him very often after that for a long while, because that was the year my father, who is an inventor, sold some of his patents to some men in England for a great deal of money, and he sent me away to school in the fall.

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I promised to tell another story about how my knowing Mr. Benson happened to get me into another very queer adventure—one that was even more exciting than the first one with Morse, the robber who pretended to be blind, and all the gang who tried to get Mr. Midgely into trouble. I know you will think the way it came was very queer.

It was before school was out in the spring of that year, that father and mother came up to St. Croix, where the academy was, and told me that they were going to England because the men who had bought the patents wanted to see father. They wanted me to go with them at first, but I didn't want to go at all, and I just begged them to let me stay at home and go camping with some of the boys who were to be taken to Little Fern Lake by one of the academy teachers, Mr. Lally. And father finally said I might, after he had talked with Mr. Lally and had arranged that I was to go down into the country to my Aunt Margaret's farm after the camping was over.

Maybe you think I wasn't glad to get permission to go on that camping expedition. I thought there would be more fun than I'd ever had in my life, though we had lots of fun at the Academy, too. But, after father and mother had left, and while we were having the June examinations, the strange thing happened that made that summer such a different one for me from what anyone could ever have expected.

One day, about a week before school was out, and when exams were just closing, Rick Neufer, who goes to St. Croix, too, came into my room after study hours and said he was tired and wanted to have some fun.

"To-morrow it will be Saturday," he said, "and I'm going to get a boy named Witter Whitehead to go out into the country with me—a kite to fly."

I laughed, for he doesn't get over saying things funny. Of course, it was just a joke to talk about Witter Whitehead to my face, as if it was somebody else than me. But he is German, and he

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tries so hard to talk English just right that he makes very queer-sounding sentences.

But kite-flying sounded good to me, and I said so, and I guess it wasn't five minutes before we had commenced work on a dandy big kite that we meant to take with us.

Of course, you like to make kites out of tissue-paper best, unless they are very big ones, but we didn't have any tissue, and we decided that we'd rather use newspapers for this one, instead of waiting till we could go down into town to buy the other kind. And it was on account of our doing just that, and while we were in the midst of putting the newspaper on the kite-frame, that I saw the printed article which really started our adventure.

We had laid the kite down on the floor in my room and had pasted the edges of the paper all around it, and Rick was just finishing tying on the tail, when I happened to look at a big black printed headline, almost under my hand on the kite's back, and I read this:



"RICK!" I CRIED, "JUST LOOK AT THIS, QUICK! MORSE HAS ESCAPED!" [Page 5.]

ESCAPED FROM PRISON!

Leader of Band of Thieves, Captured Last Year By City Police, Gets Away From Penitentiary.

WAS CAPTAIN BENSON'S PRIZE.

Refugee is Man Whose Arrest Gave Popular Police Officer His Promotion to Present Rank.

I don't know how I happened to read it at all at first, but, of course, as soon as I saw Captain Benson's name, I knew who the man must be who had escaped from prison. It couldn't be anybody but Morse himself, and in a minute I was excited as could be over it.

"Rick!" I cried, "just look at this, quick! Morse has escaped!"

"Morse who?" asked Rick, looking up. He knew who Morse was, of course, for he was at the store with me when the thieves were captured, but he didn't remember just at once.

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"Morse, the blind man!" I cried. "Or rather the man who wasn't blind. Look here!" And then I read the heading over out loud.

Well, Rick forgot the kite for a minute, just the same as I did, and we both leaned down there on our hands and knees and read all there was to read of the item. This is what it said:

The well-known criminal, Lemuel Morse, head of the gang of thieves which looted the silver department at Fleming's department store last year, and who was arrested with his accomplices by Police Captain Richard Benson, made his escape from the State penitentiary last night.

It is believed that confederates aided him outside the prison, as he bolted from the office where he had lately been employed upon some clerical work, and has disappeared completely. Officials of the prison admit that there is absolutely no clue as to his whereabouts, though the theory is that he has returned to this city. Search is being made in every direction.

It will be remembered that Andrew Benedict, one of the gang which worked under Morse's leadership, turned State's evidence at the trial, and helped to secure the conviction of his pals. It is believed that Morse's grudge against this man forms actually his strongest motive in attempting this escape, for it is known that he has threatened in the hearing of others to "make Benedict suffer" for his treachery.

There was more to the item, but we had cut it off, just diagonally across the next lines, and we couldn't find the rest of it, though we hunted and hunted for it among the scraps left from the kite. But there was enough there to make Rick and me about wild with excitement.

"Just to think, Witter, that he it is who should get away!" Rick said.

"That's the kind that always does," I said, for Captain Benson had told me once that it was always the worst criminal who made the escape from prison, because he is generally the one who

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has the longest sentence from which he wants to get away; and who has the most brains, too. And father said that was probably true, and that it was too bad a man couldn't use his brains for something better than thieving, when they were really good brains. He said that, usually, if a man would put as much work and study on honest things as he was obliged to put on stealing or forgery or anything else dishonest, he would make far more money, besides being decent and living right.

"Where do you s'pose it is that he has gone?" Rick said.

"The paper says the city," I answered. "I should think probably that might be the place he would go, wouldn't you?"

"Yes. But, Witter, aren't you glad you aren't there now?" asked Rick.

"Why?" I said, surprised.

"The paper it says Morse wishes to make Benedict suffer for sending him to prison. Perhaps he will remember that you helped to send him to prison, also."

I think what Rick said just made my heart jump. Such a thing had never come into my head, and I guess it never could have come there if he hadn't said it. And we both just sat there on the floor and looked at each other, while he seemed just as much startled as I was at the idea.

But pretty soon it seemed as if it wasn't very sensible for me to be scared about such a thing as that, for you wouldn't believe a man who had escaped from prison could get away very far without being caught again, when all the officers in the country would be looking for him. And, besides, he wouldn't hardly remember a boy like me, when he was really after a man like Benedict.

"I don't think he would be after me?" I said, when I'd thought about it.

"Maybe he would not," answered Rick. "But I'm glad you're up here at St. Croix and that your father and your mother are in Europe."

I thought, all at once, that we didn't know just when the escape had happened, for we hadn't looked for the date on that paper, and it was an

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old one, too, for we had got it out of a pile of rubbish in one of the store-rooms. And so I began looking on the kite, to see if I couldn't find out just when that paper had been printed, and by turning it over it didn't take long to find the head of the columns. And there I saw the date, which was nearly two weeks before the day we were using it for the kite. So I pointed it out to Rick.

"The escape was two weeks ago," I said. "Probably he's back in prison again now."

"Maybe," answered Rick. "How is it that we shall know?"

"We can look at the file of papers down in the library," I said, thinking that would be the quickest way, and so in about a minute we were up and just on the run for the library.

The academy at St. Croix is a dandy place to go to school, and I think I never knew how much fun and how many interesting things there are in the world till I went there. But I can't tell much about it in this story, and about all our football games and our track team and everything like that

which I'd like to tell, for they haven't anything to do with the story itself. Maybe I'll write about them sometime. But the library is in the same building in which Rick and I live, and which we call the North Dorm, or Dormitory, as it ought to be, and it is a great place, where they have all kinds of books and papers.

So we found the file of one of the city papers and began looking them over carefully. We found one that was just the same date as that on the kite, and we read the whole of the article about the escape. It didn't tell much more, though, except just what people thought Morse might be doing or where he might be hiding. So we looked on into the next papers, and we found a lot about him quite easily. The first was that a farmer way down in the southern part of the State thought he had seen the refugee, as that item called him. Then we read about the officers being after him and losing all trace of him again. Then the police at home in the city arrested a man who looked like him, but who turned out not

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to be the convict, as he was spoken of in that article. Then some tramp made a woman in a little town over east give him some food, going into her house in broad daylight, and ordering her to get him a meal. And the police thought perhaps that tramp was the fugitive, as they called him in that report. But, after the sheriff of that county had caught the tramp, he turned out not to be Morse, the runaway, as he was named then.

It seemed funny how many different names they could find to call an escaped prisoner, but it didn't seem very funny to read about what a bad man he had been, and how afraid everybody was of him, and then to remember what Rick had said about his having a grudge against me, for I really did help capture him and send him to prison, you know. And the worst of it was that when we had been all through the papers from the day after the escape up to that Friday morning, we found that Morse had not been captured at all, and that people were beginning to believe that he had got clean away and wouldn't be found.

Well, I don't like to have people think I am a coward, or just foolish, either, but I have to write it that I was really feeling pretty bad with the idea that maybe something might happen to me, if I should ever see that leader of the silver thieves again, in spite of all the things I could think of that would make it unlikely I ever could see him. But maybe if you read all of this story, you will find how easy it is for unlikely things to happen.

It was just because I didn't want Rick to think I was a coward, though, that I did some of the things that helped get me into trouble.

"Maybe you'd better not go around away from the school very much," was what he said when we went back up to my room, after we'd read the papers.

That really seemed pretty silly, and I meant to try not to be silly, so I just laughed.

"I'll go anywhere," I said, which was a lot more than I would do, I knew, but I was sort of mad at him and at myself, too, for making such a lot out of a thing that I knew would make most

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people laugh at us. And then I went on to say that I wasn't afraid to go out in the country, just as we often did Saturday, and just as we were already planning to do with the kite that next day. And I made Rick promise, too, that he wouldn't tell about the thing we'd found out, for it was almost sure to get around among the boys that I was scared.

Well, we finished the kite while we talked about the strangeness of how we'd found out about Morse's escape, and then we went down to dinner in the big dining-hall. And it was then that I found the first letter from my father, which had just come from Liverpool, in England, and had been mailed the very day he and mother had landed over there. There was another letter for me that had just come in the evening mail, but I read father's letter first, because he told me a lot of things that interested me about the ship they had crossed the Atlantic on and about the people they had seen.

But one thing surprised me very much, for, at the end of the letter, I read this last sentence:

“You will be interested to hear that the thief, Morse, who was leader of the gang you stumbled into last year, has escaped from prison. Stranger still, they tell us over here, that he is believed to have crossed the ocean under disguise on the same steamer with us. If he did, he has eluded the officers here, for they haven’t found him.”

I was all full of surprise about that, and was hardly thinking of anything else while I opened my second letter, when the name of the person who had written it to me caught my eyes first, where it was signed at the bottom of a very short note. It was from Flora Midgely, the little girl who was lame when I first knew her, but who had an operation and had been sent by Mr. Fleming up to a sanitarium not very far from St. Croix to get well. I had known she was there, and had been to see her once, but I hadn’t expected to hear from her. But, in a minute, when I had read the letter, I was almost ready to jump out of my chair at the table with the astonishment and the scare it gave me, for this is what it said:

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“WITTER: Morse has escaped. He’s been here, I’m sure, for I’ve had a note from him to write and tell him where father is. I was to leave the note in a certain place in the woods close by here for him to find it. I didn’t. And oh! what shall I do? Father and my brother Fred are down South, and I’m afraid to tell anybody here, for I don’t know what Morse would do if I did. I won’t dare go out, either, for fear he will be looking for me. You will do something I know—quick.

Your friend,

“FLORA MIDGELY.”

CHAPTER II

THE SHADOW AT THE WINDOW

You can imagine, I guess, how that letter affected me. Of course, I was pretty sure, right away, that Flora must be right about her note being from Morse, for it seemed to me that he might appear anywhere at any minute. It wasn't very queer, either, I thought, after all the things we had learned that day, and I felt more afraid than ever that he was really going to try to make trouble for all of us who were concerned in his first arrest.

So the thing that I thought of, as the thing I ought to do, was to send word to Captain Benson, right away, and as I was so much stirred up now that I couldn't think of eating anything, I just

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got up from the table and went out immediately. Rick saw me go, and thought I was sick, as I guess the other boys at the table thought. And he came after me and caught me in the hall, as anxious as could be. He's a nice little chap and a good friend.

"What is it that makes you so pale, Witter?" he asked.

I just handed him father's letter and Flora's. He knew her and he knew where she was. I think the sanitarium wasn't more than twenty miles from St. Croix, on a lake—not Little Fern Lake, where we were to camp, but a lake called Frayne Lake.

"What do you think of that?" I asked him, and I know I was just about trembling then, because so many things had happened so quickly that day that I hardly knew what to expect.

Rick exclaimed over the letter, of course, but he was pretty quick to think, too. "So!" he said. "He's after the little girl first, to ask questions."

"Yes."

"How did he know that she was there?"

"I don't know. That was easy to find out, though."

"What will you do?" he asked.

"I don't know what to do," I answered. "I want to send word to Captain Benson."

"That is it—do send the word to him!" exclaimed Rick. "He will know what it is to do."

"Of course. But how shall I send it?"

"Telegraph."

"I don't dare. Everybody can read a telegram."

"It is that is true. Send a letter."

"I guess I'll have to, but it's so slow."

"Maybe Flora was mistaken. She doesn't say how the letter from Morse was signed."

"No, but trust her to know. He probably let her understand easily who he is."

"Do you suppose it is that anybody would play a trick on her?" asked Rick.

"How?"

"Just to scare her."

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"No, I don't think so. And we know the man really is free, and roaming around."

"But your father says he was told the man is in England."

"That's just another rumor. No, I believe Flora is right."

We went upstairs again, and to my room. I was so nervous about everything now that I just hated to see that kite there in the room, too, with the black letters on it telling about the escape, but I had to just stop being excited, I knew, and do something.

"Let's see if we can't write a telegram no one but Captain Benson will understand," I said, because I was sure I shouldn't delay any longer than I had to. And I got paper and pencil at once.

"Will you tell people here at the academy, Witter?" Rick asked me.

"No," I answered. "I don't think we'd better till we hear something more."

"They might tell you what to do."

"They might talk, though, and maybe Captain

Benson would have a chance to catch Morse if the runaway didn't know he was suspected of being in the State. Besides, it would be taking a chance of letting Morse know that Flora had told of his being near where she is. I don't know what he might do to her and to me, too, if we got the officers close after him and then they failed to catch him."

I began to try to write a message to Captain Benson. It was hard, for I did not know what to say, but in a minute Rick began to help me, and when I was really at work, it began to be easier, so we wrote it like this:

"Refugee heard from, near place where Flora is. Threatens her. Ask Fleming for her address. Haven't told anyone. WITTER."

That seemed to be clear. Captain Benson would know who Flora was, of course, for he knew all about her, and he would know how to get her address right away, from Mr. Fleming. And

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I thought no one else could read that telegram very intelligently. Rick thought it was good, too. So we went downstairs again, and, as supper wasn't over, we just skipped without asking permission, and ran over town and sent the message from the office there.

Then I took Flora's letter and enclosed it in an envelope, and slipped in a note telling when it had come, and mailed it to Captain Benson, too, so he'd understand all I did. And I wrote a note to Flora, too, to let her know what I'd done.

When it was done it seemed to me that I could hardly believe anything like what we had been hearing about all that afternoon and evening really could be happening, when everything else was so quiet and nice all around us, and when we got back to the school, and managed to get in without being caught by Mr. Lally, who has charge of the North Dorm, and found all the boys studying quietly in their rooms, it seemed as if maybe there wasn't so much to be afraid of, even if such a man as Morse was at liberty somewhere,

and even if he was trying to find the people he wanted to make trouble for. Surely the police would find him soon, and meanwhile, everybody was safe from him, if he couldn't learn where they were.

But I couldn't go to sleep very well that night, after Rick had gone to his room and I had gone to bed, because I really hadn't any studying to do and because I knew that morning would come quicker if I went to sleep earlier. I saw pictures when I shut my eyes, the way you always do at night when you can't sleep. And I kept seeing Morse just as he used to be when he pretended to be a blind beggar near Fleming's store. I could see his face with its blue goggles and the long beard, and his queer way of laughing, just opening his mouth and chuckling without making hardly any noise.

Of course, the man must be hiding somewhere out in the woods that surrounded Frayne Lake. He wouldn't dare to show himself to anyone around the country. I could imagine how he was

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camping out deep among the trees, somewhere in the valley there, for there is a really pretty big woods all around Frayne. He couldn't have a fire, and it must be hard for him to get food, and he wouldn't have even an axe or a gun or anything, perhaps, to help make a camp or get game with. Maybe he would have to lie out in the bushes every night, even when it rained, as it had sometimes during the last week, and to live just like an animal.

I shivered over my own thoughts, for it is terrible to think of a man, who hates everybody and who is really hated by everybody, hiding and being hunted for day after day that way. I wondered how he could feel safe for a single minute. If I was afraid at all that he might come after me—that just one man like Morse might come on me unexpectedly and do me any harm—how must he feel, when he knew that practically everybody was after him to send him back to prison?

I don't believe any man can ever be very happy who has been a thief or who has done anything

else bad like that. He must feel terribly miserable, I think, to know that nobody is a friend of his and that he hasn't any place he can go and be free from danger. It must be harder for him to sleep than for me, I thought.

I guess it was about when I was thinking of how sleepy and tired Morse would get in a week or two, going through that kind of experiences, that I went to sleep myself, and I must have slept just like a log, as people say, not to have heard all that I found out afterwards happened.

I had locked my door that night. We are not supposed to leave our doors locked at night in the Dorm, but we are allowed to have locks on them, so that we can fasten them when we go away or anything. But I might just as well tell that I was more scared that night than even Rick knew. I felt a lot better to know that the lock was on, for I knew how easy it would be, for anybody who wanted to, to get into the Dorm downstairs and to come up and come into a room, without meeting anybody or making any noise that would be

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heard. And I knew that I slept pretty soundly, too, for the boys had played a trick or two on me when I was asleep, and I hadn't even waked up once when they "stacked" everything in my room, except the bed itself.

Well, I dreamed and dreamed, I know, for I can remember some of the queer things that were happening to me. Did you ever dream that you were out away in a strange country somewhere, where all the land was just full of stairways, and that somebody was chasing and chasing you? That's a dream I've had lots of times, and I had it that night. It seemed as if, somehow, I could get down those stairs just fine, too, for I would take a run at the top and just sort of skate all down the steps, only touching the edge of each and making the whole of one long flight in each slide without ever falling. Then when I got down the stairs, I'd jump into the air, and the force of my jump would carry me a long ways. When I began to come down towards the earth, I'd just jump again, without touching the ground, and so

could keep myself up till I came to another stairway, and made another slide.

It's a dream that is lots of fun to have, and maybe somebody else who reads this will remember that he has had it, too, for father says people often have dreams that are alike. But that night the dream ended very suddenly, as it never had ended before, in a bump at the bottom of one stairway, and I found myself wide awake, looking out into the darkness and listening with all my might.

My room isn't a big one. None of the boys' rooms are. The bed stands over to the right as you go in, with its head farthest from you, and toward the window, which is just opposite the door. A table usually stands just in the middle of the room and some chairs are always around. I've got a bookcase over on the opposite side from the bed, and my tennis racket and baseball bats and all those things are piled in the corner between the bookcase and the window.

When I opened my eyes I could just make out

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the table in the middle of the room. At first that was the only thing I could see at all, for it was a pretty dark night, without any moon. Then I could make out the door, which was lighter colored than the wall paper. And then I turned to look up toward the window. I seemed, even then, to be all in a fuss about something. My heart was beating hard, as if I'd really been running and jumping on all those stairs, with somebody after me, instead of just dreaming about it.

I hadn't any idea what had waked me up, but when I looked at that big gray square that I knew was the window, I was sure that something very strange was going on, for, right in the middle of it, a figure that was sort of shadowy black against the sky, was just as plain as could be, close to it and looking in.

I guess every person who has been frightened knows how the shivers just came out of your neck and run all over the skin of your back when it happens. It's specially so, I think, if you're like I was then, and can't do a thing. There was only

one thing in the world I could think of, and that was that the person who was out there was Morse, come after me, sure as could be. He'd probably found out where I was, just as he'd found out about Flora's place, and now he was trying to get in.

The window was open about six inches, as we always have to leave our windows at night. The room was on the second floor, right over the porch, so I didn't have to guess how a man could get up to it. I tried to make myself believe that one of the boys was there trying to play some trick on me again, for some of the other room windows opened on the porch, too. But the figure was too big for any boy, I was sure, and, besides, it didn't act like a boy.

There was a screen on the window, for it was getting warm weather, and we always had them on early. The man outside was fumbling and fumbling, trying to get it open, and he was acting so queer and so hurried that I was just wild with terror of him. I lay still, at first just because I

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couldn't realize what was happening, I guess, or was too scared to stir; but when I found that he couldn't get the screen open very easily, it just seemed as if the muscles in my body suddenly got loose so I could move, and all at once I just scrambled out of bed and to the floor and commenced to creep towards the door. If I could get there and get out, I thought, then I would holler and wake everybody in the dorm up, and the man wouldn't dare come in.

Before I got to the door the idea came to me of how terrible it would be if Morse should get into the window quick after I got out into the hall and should follow me swiftly and get out into the building, too. He could run through the halls in the darkness, among the boys and the teachers who would come, and he could do something awful, maybe to me or maybe to somebody else, and get away easily. And I was more afraid of that, it seemed to me, than I was to turn around and look at him again, there at the window. And when I did turn, the thought of throwing some-

thing at him came to me, and I reached right out to a rack by the door where I knew my Indian clubs and dumb-bells were, and I grabbed the first thing I felt, and just turned and threw it as hard as I could right at the window and the man behind it.

The club, for that was what I threw, smashed the glass with a terrible crash, and all the pieces went jingling to the sill and down to the floor with a horrible noise. Breaking glass always sounds as if something dreadful is happening, anyway, because you always hear it at fires, and you never hear it at all unless there is some kind of an accident occurring. And it echoed all over the building, and outside, and everywhere. And then I just unlocked and pulled open my door and hollered and hollered for help.

CHAPTER III

ON THE TRAIL OF A HAWK

Now, I don't like to be laughed at any better than anybody else, and I don't really think there is anything to laugh at in the thing that happened that night. Still, all the boys all over school were laughing at me the next day, for who do you suppose it was at the window when I threw the dumb-bell? It was Mr. Lally.

It was all out in a minute, of course, after the crash of the glass and all the rest of the racket I made. Mr. Lally had come to my room after I was asleep and found my door locked. He knocked and knocked and called until he got frightened because I didn't answer, and then, at last, he had gone in through one of the other

rooms that opened on the porch and had come around to my window to try to get in and see if I was sick or anything.

It was lucky that the screen was in the window, or the glass might have cut him pretty badly. As it was, all the glass went against the wires, which the club wasn't heavy enough to break, and he wasn't hurt at all. But he was scared, too, I can tell you, and some of us fellows couldn't help laughing about that, for he is a sort of funny fellow. He studies very hard and wears glasses, and tries to make us all do just what we ought to, and will really do almost anything for you, if you need it. But he does lots of queer things, too, and the way he hollered and scrambled away from that window when the glass broke right in his face was funny.

But he had as good a right to be scared as I had, I guess, so I felt sort of sorry to have the boys laugh at him. And he showed he was a good kind of a fellow, because he didn't get mad, but just laughed, too, at himself and at me. Of

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course, all the noise and excitement got every boy in the house up and out, and when they found nothing was really the matter, they began to jolly me like everything.

I know that a fellow never ought to get mad when he is jollied about a joke that is on him, and, of course, that joke, what there was of it, was surely on me. I knew it was because I had been so nervous when I went to bed that I had been so very much frightened by the figure at the window, and hadn't waited to find out who it was before I smashed the glass and made such a fuss. But when I found out why Mr. Lally was trying to get into my room, I found at the same time that I couldn't tell anybody the reason why I had been such a coward. For a telegram had come for me after we were all asleep, and Mr. Lally had brought it up to my room.

"WITTER WHITEHEAD,

"St. Croix Academy.

"All right. Will protect Flora. Don't talk.

"BENSON."

I don't know whether I would have been able to keep still that next day and the days after, at the academy, if the telegram hadn't said "Don't talk." It seemed to me that I had to tell the boys about what I knew, for they made so much fun about my being so scared that I thought I couldn't stand it. I laughed at first, and I really didn't blame them very much for making fun, for I knew I would have laughed at another boy for the same thing, if I didn't know he had a better reason for being frightened out of his wits than just seeing a person at his window.

But when they kept it up and kept it up, calling me "the watch dog," and pretending to pat me on the back because I had "barked" so loud and waked up the whole house when "burglars" were around, it was hard not to get mad. Then, pretty soon, one of the boys called me "Fido," and everybody just howled over that and took it right up, and I heard it everywhere I went. No—not everybody, for there were some of the fellows who thought it was mean, and, of course, Rick didn't call me so, because he understood.

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Well, I had to stand it, but you can believe that I'll always remember that it isn't so funny to tease a fellow over a thing like that, because he may really not deserve it at all. I nearly had a fight once or twice with some of the boys who were the worst about it. But, in the end, it all made me make up my mind that the only way I could ever get rid of that name would be to prove that I wasn't a coward. And that made me really almost anxious that something would happen to give me a chance.

This is the way it was all that next week. I would come down to breakfast in the morning, and the minute I stepped into the dining-room, somebody would lean over and pat his knee and make a noise with his lips, like you make when you call a dog. Then somebody else would whistle. Of course, they had to do it in a way so that Mr. Lally wouldn't notice from where he sat at the head table, but they made me hear and see. Once they piled a lot of bones on a plate and sent it up to my room, leaving it at the door,

marked "Reward for Fido." Out on the campus they would bark in little squeaky voices when I passed — "Bow-wow-wow! Wow-wow!" like that. And they would stand and call to me in the halls when none of the instructors were around: "Come Fido! Good doggie!" and hold up their arms in a hoop and say, "Here! Jump through this!"

I suppose you will laugh. It makes me laugh now, to remember all the things they thought of to say. They are a mighty fine lot of fellows at St. Croix, I want to tell you, though, and I don't hold any grudges now for any of the "kidding," as they called it, that they gave me. But then it was about the toughest time I ever went through.

But I kept still, though I got madder and madder. I was pretty sure that, if they knew all the story about Morse, they wouldn't have done it, but I knew, too, that if I told anybody at all, it would go all over school and all over town, too, and, of course, then the little St. Croix newspaper would be sure to print a lot of stuff about it, and

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then it would be almost impossible that it shouldn't be known to Morse or some of his friends. They would surely be watching the papers around our part of the State, if he was hiding anywhere near Frayne Lake.

The time for the closing of school came, though, right in the middle of my troubles, and as soon as commencement day was over most of the fellows were off with a rush for the summer vacation, and only eight of us, who were going on the camping excursion with Mr. Lally, were left. I hadn't heard a word more from Flora or from Mr. Benson, so I supposed nothing new had happened, and Rick said he was sure Flora had had a false alarm. He said that maybe some of the friends of Morse were just trying to make reports spring up in all the different places they could, so as to keep the officers busy on wrong tracks till he could get away. He thought somebody besides Morse might have written the note to Flora just for such a reason as that, thinking she would tell, as she had.

That seemed pretty likely to me, too, when we talked it over, and I began to believe that maybe Morse had really got away to England, as the people had told father, or had gone somewhere away outside our State, and wasn't in any of the places where he had been reported to be.

I wrote to Captain Benson and to Flora, too, before I left on the camping trip, telling them where I would be, and asking them to let me know as soon as anything happened. But it wasn't till after we were over at Little Fern Lake, in our camp, that anything more did occur, and then it was entirely different from anything I had ever imagined.

The boys stopped jollyng me quite so much when he really got to camp, though they still called me Fido quite often. There were so many other interesting things to do that they began to forget. But I didn't forget it. You know how you remember anything like that, which has made you very much ashamed, and you always feel as if you have to do something to make people think

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more of you, after they have made fun of you. It just stayed in my mind. I'd wake up in the night, in camp, and think about it. I thought about it when I was out in the woods, and when I was fishing or swimming or rowing, or anything we did. I got so I began to feel that the very reason why the boys had stopped talking was that they had come to think it wasn't so much a joke as it was a fact that I was easily scared. And then, when, one day, I happened to overhear Mr. Lally telling Jim Ainsworth, who had been one of the worst jollyers, that it wasn't my fault if my nerves were high-strung, and that a fellow can't always show just how brave he is when he is waked out of sound sleep and unexpectedly faces a test, it seemed to me that I would give about anything for a chance to prove to them all that I wasn't a coward.

It was almost the next day, I think, that Rick and I went off in the woods to talk and explore. We took a boat and rowed up to the head of the lake, first to the place where Little Fern River

empties into it. We wanted to see what the valley was like, for the river comes down between hills for a long ways—nine or ten miles, I think, and the sides were so steep that there weren't any farms along there at all, but just heavy woods with a road cut into the bluff, high up on each side, for teams which went back and forth between the lake and the town of Frayne. The woods were thick, too, and there was lots of brush and that sort of thing, except right on the bank of the river, where people sometimes landed from boats. It was as wild as it could be in such a settled part of the country, and that was why it was fun for us to explore it.

I think we had been thinking a little less about Morse lately than when we were at school, and had begun to feel that he had probably gone out of our part of the country if he was ever there at all, for I'm sure we hadn't much real idea that he could be near Frayne or the Little Fern. We talked about it and about what we would or could do if we should find him, and we went sort of

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looking around and half pretending we thought we might see him or a place where he had been. But I know I hadn't any notion at all that we'd see anything any more dangerous than a squirrel or a woodpecker.

We had a good time that day. We had carried our lunch, and as we could both swim, and as there wasn't any other danger to think of but the water, Mr. Lally was always willing to let us take all-day trips if we wanted to. We'd promise to get back before dark, that was all. So we explored all along the shore of the river, a long ways, and had a swim and ate our lunch and explored some more. We didn't go up high on the hillside at first.

But pretty soon after lunch we found a path that led up through the woods, and that we thought it would be fun to follow, and we climbed way up among the trees. It was very steep and rough. In some places the path was just steps cut in the earth, and in other places you could hardly find it at all, for it almost disappeared. But

we got interested in just keeping on it and searching it out, through all the windings.

I guess it was about half way up to the top of the ravine that we came to a sort of gully. The path ran along one side pretty plainly, but down in the bottom there was a little brook that was running from up above somewhere, and, because I was thirsty and Rick was getting tired, I wanted to climb down in there, right away, and get a drink and take a rest. So we left the path and climbed down over the mossy stones, for there were rocks there, and we got down after a while to the bottom.

We got a drink and sat there resting for quite a long time, when all at once a queer thing happened. A hawk—an awfully big one, too—came suddenly right over the edge of the gully, up above us, and lighted on an old stub of a tree up there. He had something in his claws, too. We couldn't see what it was, but just the second we saw it we were interested, of course.

The bird didn't seem to see us, and I never saw

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a hawk so near as he was. He was such a fierce-looking one, and he sat so still on his perch, looking and looking, that it seemed as if he must see us pretty quickly. I don't know whether he would or not, if Rick hadn't moved, but Rick did move a little after a minute, just stretching out his hand or his foot or something, and then the hawk flew away in a second. But the funny part of it was that he didn't fly up, but just sort of dived away down through the gully, and seemed to disappear at a place where the rocks jutted out from the side. And that made us think he must have lighted again, and that maybe he had a nest up in there somewhere.

Well, of course, we wanted to find that nest right away, but we knew it wouldn't be any use to try to follow the hawk up through the gully. So, after we talked it over, we decided that maybe, if we climbed out of the gully carefully, on the other side from where we came in, and got to the top of a little sort of mound-like rock on the hill which was just beyond us, we might be

able to see well enough so as to know just where Mr. Hawk would fly up from when he should see us coming.

It wasn't very easy climbing, and we never would have tried to get out of the gully that way, I know, if we hadn't wanted to see that hawk again. The rock on that side was all moss covered, too, and pretty slippery. But we managed it, after while, trying not to make a noise or to get where the hawk might see us move. And, at last, we got to the top and found a place where we could creep up on the moss lying down, and peek over.

But what we saw, when we did it, wasn't a hawk or a hawk's nest, or anything else like that. It was a man—a tall man, in rough clothes, who seemed to be kneeling down on his hands and knees on just the other side of our rock, not fifty feet from where we were, and looking down below him at something we couldn't see.

CHAPTER IV

A TELL-TALE STRAW HAT

It was so quiet all around us in the woods, with only the wind moving the leaves above us a little, and a bird twittering once in a while, that we could hear the brook back down below us. Nothing at all was stirring, and the figure of the man, kneeling there in the bushes and looking down among the rocks, was just as still as everything around him. You might almost have taken him for a log, I guess, if it hadn't been for his white shirt sleeves.

He surely didn't know we were anywhere near him, for he didn't show the slightest sign that he thought of anything at all except what he was looking at. And he just stared and stared and

stared for so long that you could hardly believe he could keep from moving for such a time. But at last he did move, and pretty quickly, too, for he started back from his place suddenly and sat up, and looked all around slowly, as if he'd heard something. Rick and I dodged down flat behind some little bushes that grew in the shallow earth on top of the rock. He couldn't see us there, and we were somehow afraid to let him see us then. But by moving around a little we could see him through the leaves.

He stood up and walked a little ways. He was on a kind of flat top of another lower rock than ours, and it seemed to me by the way he acted that he could see from where he was away down the gully and the path that ran beside it, for he looked up and down in the direction the path ran, as if he was expecting somebody or was afraid somebody would come. And we could see then that he had a gun with him—a very queer-looking, short-barreled shotgun, it seemed like. And he carried it in his right hand as if he was just ready to use it.

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I don't know why I should think he was anybody to be afraid of. It never even occurred to me that he might be Morse, for he was tall and thin, and his hair was cut short and he hadn't any beard. He didn't turn his face exactly toward us, so that I could see it plainly, for quite a while, but kept looking off over the gully and up at the woods above. But I knew I didn't want him to see us, because it just seemed that there was something peculiar about him, as if he was afraid someone might see him, or as if he was guarding something or somebody. Perhaps, I only think now that I thought so then, for, of course, I know now what he really was guarding.

But, after he had walked about quite a few minutes and had stood still, too, quite a while on the side of his rock towards the gully, he went back to the place where he had been at first and kneeled down again and commenced looking once more down among the rocks. And then, in a minute, I heard him say something, as if to somebody down below, and he laid down his gun and

picked up a gunnysack that was beside him and began to pull some things out of the bushes and stuff into it. And when I saw what the things were he was putting into the bag, I just held my breath, for what do you think?—it was money! It was packages of bills! I could tell, for I've seen bills all done up that way lots of times, while I worked at Fleming's store. The cash always used to come from the banks that way, wrapped up, you know, in packages of one hundred or two hundred or five hundred dollars. And that's the way this money was, only he had quite a lot of packages, and they were as much as two inches thick, so that, even if they were only one-dollar bills, there were a great lot of them.

But he put them all in the sack and tied a cord to it, and he let the whole thing down into the hole, and then he knelt there watching and watching again. Suddenly, while I was watching close, though, he leaned down all at once and reached one hand into the space below him and began to lift and tug at something.

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I was so much interested that I sort of forgot that I was trying to hide, and got up on my hands and knees and looked over the top of the bushes at him, and as I did that I saw that he was helping to pull somebody else out of a hole which was in between the big stones. I saw a hand come up out of the hole, fast hold of his hand, and then another hand that grasped hold of the edge of the rock, and next minute I saw the face of another man come up into the sunlight.

Rick saw it, too, and he gave me a punch. But I just nodded and watched again, for it was pretty exciting then. The second man was climbing out on the rock beside the first man. He was a short, fat fellow, whose face was red as could be, as if he had found his climb pretty hard work. But before I noticed him much, except to be pretty sure I'd never seen him before, the first man was reaching down again and helping still another person to come up. And in a minute the third one of their party was out on the rocks, too, and they were standing together and talking in low tones.

The third man was a short man, just as the second was, but he was a square sort of a man instead of a fat one. He looked as if he might be very strong. His hair was black and he wore a black, bristly mustache, and his face had a sort of hard, ugly look, with his mouth drawn down at the corners so that deep wrinkles came there, and there were wrinkles in his forehead, as if he was used to scowling most of the time.

They stood talking quite a few minutes, as if they couldn't decide or agree about something, and once the fat man commenced to speak so loud that I could hear what he said quite plainly till the others suddenly made him stop and speak lower. The words were "there's no more we can do here to-day"; but they didn't mean anything to me. But they hushed him up very quickly, and you better believe I was afraid then to have them know we were watching them.

But they didn't stand there very long. The fat man brushed some dirt off his clothes, and then, after looking around them a little, they started to

climb down the rock into the gully, and a minute later we saw them on the way up the hill path together, as if they were going to the top.

Now, if I hadn't been jollied so much for being easily scared, and if Rick hadn't been there to see, I don't know what I might have done, for I began to remember the time I got into trouble when I tried to spy on the silver thieves at home in the city. And I surely thought these men, hiding money out here in the woods, must be robbers, too, or something like that. But I was pretty curious to know what that hole in the rocks was, and what the men could have done with the money down there, and I made up my mind to go and look. I told Rick, as soon as it seemed safe to talk, and he was mighty interested, too, but he said he thought I'd better not. I guess that was what made me really decide to go out on that rock and look, for he said he wouldn't think I would dare to do it, and I wasn't feeling like letting anybody say that to me. He didn't mean to dare me, I know, but I took it that way.

Well, we waited a long time, and we watched the woods and listened, and then, at last, when no one seemed to be anywhere near us any more, I did creep out of our hiding-place and I slid down to the rock the men had been on and went over to the hole. I did it pretty quickly, for I wanted to have a look and then get back under cover again as soon as I could, for I didn't know what to expect.

It was easy enough getting there from where we were. The lower rock was bare of moss and not slippery, and it was almost as flat as a porch. I ran across it to the edge, and looked down between the bushes which came up beside it. And what I saw there was so unexpected that I could hardly believe it. There was a hole between the rocks, but it was much larger and wider than I had supposed. It was as much as twenty feet across, I think, and not round, but jagged, with the bare rocks forming its sides. But it was deep, and down below the first few feet the shadows of the trees and the rocks made it rather dim and dark,

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so that you couldn't see everything very plainly. At the bottom, though, or rather far down inside, I could see a shine, which I knew in a minute was the light on water there, just as it looks in an old-fashioned well. And it was so far down and looked so dark and still that it was a scary thing just to look at.

But I couldn't see anything anywhere that showed how the men had got down in there. I could see how a man might climb down and up on the rocks, if he had a rope or something to hold on by, because the rocks were not smooth, and would furnish plenty of steps. But I couldn't find any sign that they had had a rope, and it made me shiver to think of trying to get down those steep rocks with only the broken edges and cracks to hang on to. I couldn't see any place where they could have put that bag of money, either.

I motioned to Rick to come down, for I wanted him to see the place, too, and he came in a minute. And while he was getting down from our rock to the flat one, I picked up a loose stone and threw

it down into the hole, just as a sort of test to see how deep it was. I guess the hole probably wasn't so deep as I thought, but the splash of the stone in the water sounded very hollow and lonesome, I tell you.

"What do you think of it?" I asked Rick, as he looked carefully in over the edge.

"Whew!" he answered, drawing back, "I'd hate to fall in there."

"So would I," I said. "And I'd like to know what those men were doing down there. This is a queer kind of a place for men to come and climb in and out, and hide money. This must be eight miles from Frayne, and we're at least six from our camp on Little Fern. I don't think there's a town very near here."

"How do they get down?" asked Rick.

"I can't imagine."

"Maybe they had a rope."

"I didn't see it, did you?"

"No. But perhaps they left it hanging inside."

Rick is pretty quick to think of such things as

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that, and as quick as he said it, he commenced looking around for a stick. When he found one, he lay down on the edge of the rock and reached over, and before I really knew what he was trying to do, he had poked under the overhanging top of the stones and had pulled out a hanging inch line with his stick.

“Gee!” he said when he saw it. “They weren’t here just for one time. They use this line a good deal.”

I looked at it, too, and I found that there were knots in it, as if to help make the climbing easy, and it showed a good deal dirtied by the hands that had used it. And then we found it was fastened to a heavy stake driven into a crack just under the edge of rock.

I guess Rick and I both got nervous about being out on that rock pretty quickly after we saw that line. There wasn’t any doubt at all that what he said was true, and that it couldn’t be known when the men might be coming back, even if they had just left.

"I'm going away from here," Rick said, and he got up from his place. "I'm afraid."

He stood up and let the rope slide off the stick. But just as he turned towards me, a thing happened that made us both suddenly pretty scared. The wind, which was blowing pretty strong over the top of the rocks, suddenly caught his straw hat off his head, and, in a second, it was over the edge of the hole in the rocks, and was sailing down zigzagging, turning over, striking the sides and bounding, but surely on its way to the water below. We both looked over the edge, and we could see plainly enough to know when the hat struck the water and to see it floating around, brim up, as it happened. But Rick didn't wait a second.

"They'll know from the hat that we've been here!" he exclaimed, looking at me, and suddenly biting his lip and holding it, the way little boys do sometimes when they get frightened. And I couldn't say that the men wouldn't think they had been watched by somebody, if they should find a hat down in the hole. Maybe they were robbers

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like the silver thieves, who came here to hide the things they stole. If they were, of course, they would be ready to do almost anything to prevent other people from finding out.

"I'm afraid!" Rick said again. "Come on. Let's go! What if they'd come back?"

"I'd like to get that hat out of there," I said. I was mighty excited. I knew if we left the hat there it would be found sure, and the men might think their hiding-place was known. Of course, they might imagine that it had happened just as it did, but they would perhaps take their money away somewhere else in fear that whoever had lost the hat might come back. Of course, if they were thieves, I wanted to let somebody know about them—Mr. Benson, if I could—and I began to hope, right away, that maybe here was a new chance for me to do something to help capture some men that the police wanted. I knew that, if I could, the boys would all think it was great. I hadn't even told them about the silver thieves then, because it seemed like crowing at first, and

because I was too mad after their jollying, but I knew I'd be glad to tell them about this—or to have them know it, after what had happened in the dormitory.

But I knew I wouldn't dare try to climb down into that hole, so the only thing I could think of, for getting out the hat, was to fish for it.

"I wish—I wish we had a fishline," I said, "and a hook."

Rick looked at me, kind of worried; but all at once his face lightened up a little.

"There's a fishline under the forward seat in our boat," he answered, "and I've got a hook. Maybe—maybe we can get it."

Well, we didn't waste a minute then. It was a long ways to where we had left the boat, but it was early still, and there was time enough for us to go there and to get back home to camp before dark, if we hustled. I was pretty sure, from what the fat man had said, that they were not coming back that day, and it seemed worth while to try.

So we started. But, as we thought it would be

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shorter for us to go some other way than the way we had come up through the winding path, we began to look around, and it seemed as if the trees over to the left were rather thinner than they were just below us, and we might be able to get through that way down to the riverside, where we could make good speed.

Well, we climbed down off that rock on the other side from the gully, and started to go down the hill and toward the river. The brush was pretty thick, but there wasn't any danger of not knowing which way to go, for the side of the ravine was so steep that we knew we only had to go down hill to the river. But, as we were scrambling along, trying to get on as fast as we could, all at once we came out into an unexpected open place in the woods, and found another stream of water running quietly along on a sort of level place in the side of the hill, to a little falls, farther on, where it jumped down towards the river.

It was on what father says to call a shoulder of the hill, a place where the ground flattened out

in its steep pitch to the river, as if just to make a place for people—or for a brook—to rest, on the way down. But we had no sooner stepped out beside that little brook and looked back up its course, than Rick suddenly caught hold of my arm and pointed.

“Look!” he said.

I looked, and there, coming meandering along, not twenty feet away from us, was a hat, floating brim-side up on the water, a straw hat—Rick’s hat, as I knew in a minute, for it came floating right straight to our very feet, and stopped against the weeds there. And Rick picked it up and found his mark in it.

CHAPTER V

IN THE HEART OF THE ROCKS

OF course, anybody knows how surprised we were, but it made us think pretty quick. There was only one thing that could be the truth, and that was that the stream we were standing by was an outlet from that deep well-like pool back among the rocks.

"Did you ever hear of such a thing?" Rick asked, as he let the water run out of the hat.

"Yes," I answered. "I've heard of underground rivers, and I saw a place once where a brook came out of a cave, and nobody knew where it came from."

"Do you s'pose there's a cave up there where we were?" asked Rick. "Maybe a robbers' cave?"

"I don't know," I said. "I think those men must be robbers. What other reason could they have for hiding money?"

"Do robbers have to hide their money?"

"Of course, but I didn't suppose any robbers ever needed to hide in caves any more."

"It's a good place, though. Who do you think those men are?"

"How can I tell? You know as much about them as I do."

Rick looked down at his hat. "If this hat could float out of that well and down here, that stream must be quite a little stream all the way," he said.

"Yes," I answered, "and there's room enough between the surface and the rocks so that the hat could pass."

"Of course," said Rick, "and maybe more. Maybe there's a way into that place that isn't over the rocks."

"And if there is," I said, "then those men don't know it, for they'd never use that rope if they didn't have to."

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"Don't you think they'd be sure to know if there was another way in?"

"Yes, I do."

"Would you dare to go and try to find out?"

There was that question about daring again. I was so much worked up, after being thought a coward so long, that it made me mad to have Rick ask me that twice in that afternoon. Besides, this was going to be an awfully exciting adventure, I could see, and I guess any boy would have liked it.

"Of course I dare," I answered. "Dare you?"

"Yes," Rick said, laughing, with big eyes just shining. "Let's."

Well, we didn't know just how we were to follow that little stream back up to where it came from, for its way led through some pretty tall weeds and bushes. But where we were, the bottom of it was nice and sandy, and we knew there couldn't be many bushes and weeds in the stream itself, or the hat couldn't have come down so easily, so we didn't wait long before we decided to take off our shoes and stockings and wade.

I never thought but what the water would be as warm as the river and the lake were, where we had been in swimming several times since we commenced camping, but when we got our stockings off and stepped in, it was so cold that it made us jump. I guess Rick wanted to back out, too, but I wouldn't then, so we hid our things and started. By wading a little ways and then climbing out on some part of the bank or on a log or something, we managed to get along without freezing up, too, though I know my feet ached pretty hard several times.

It wasn't very far, though, and pretty soon we came to another little falls, where the water dropped down from a place about as high as our heads, and when we had climbed up the bank there we could see that the stream must come almost straight from the rocks where the deep hole was. So we kept on through the high brush. We couldn't see far, because so many trees were in the way, but we were sure that the direction was right.

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It was mighty pretty down in that brook. The thick bushes on all sides, with the trees high over our heads, made almost a roof over us sometimes. I guess we couldn't really see the sky much of the time. Logs of fallen trees lay across the stream in places, and these were covered with vines and moss. Sometimes there were big rocks at the sides of the water, on which we would step out and get warm, and sometimes there was just grass or bushes, bushes, bushes! We had to climb over or crawl under the logs, and sometimes, when there wasn't a warm rock to step out on, we had to force our way into the bushes for a place to stand, away from the cold water.

So we climbed and waded and pushed our way up to the little rapids and small, foot-high falls, and along the more level places where the stream ran quiet till, at last, suddenly we came right up face to face with rocks—high, big ones, that we knew must be part of those we had been on that day. And we found that the brook came straight out of a hole between two great stones which lay

together like the two legs of a letter A, with moss and twigs all over the tops of them and dirt filling the upper part of the crack between them.

We stopped and looked at that place together. It looked pretty queer, for it was only just about big enough for a man to go into if he stooped down low, and it wasn't really much too big for me. It was dark inside, right from the opening, too, for the rocks of the roof overhung so far that they shut out the light almost entirely. Then we found that the water grew deeper just at the opening, though there was still a good gravel bottom.

We couldn't stand still in the brook and look the place over very long, for we had to get out and get our feet warm again. So we climbed out on a big rock, just at one side, and lay there with the sun coming down through the trees and on to us, to talk about it.

"It'll be pretty risky going any farther," Rick said, speaking low, for we both seemed to speak low, just naturally, when we got to the rocks,

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even though we did believe the men had gone away for the day.

"I don't know," I answered. "Maybe it will, but I'm going."

"Inside?" asked Rick.

"Yes."

"I'd like to, but maybe there's holes in there that we'd fall into."

"We'll have to be awfully careful and feel our way."

"Maybe there's snakes in there."

"Too cold. Snakes don't live where it's so cold. I think there is a spring in that hole where the men were."

Rick was as interested as I was, and, of course, a place like that would make any boy want to go in and see what it was like. But, after seeing the three men put the money down in there and then climb out and act so queerly as they had on the rocks, I had two other reasons why I wanted to go on. One was so that Rick would know I wasn't afraid, and the other because I wanted to

know whether we could find out, by ourselves, all about them and about the place. I was excited about it, but I just felt determined that I wouldn't let anything make me back out.

But Rick was thinking about something else, and pretty soon he spoke in a quick, but sort of scared whisper.

"Don't you think maybe those men have got Morse hid in these rocks?" he asked.

The way he said it made me feel pretty queer, though I had already thought of that. And I had sort of believed he couldn't be there, because it would be a pretty bad place for a man to have to stay very long. Besides, I felt so sure somebody would have heard more about Morse, if he was still in that part of the country, that I believed he had gone. So I answered Rick as if I was certain.

"No," I said. "He couldn't live in a place like that."

"Wouldn't they choose just such a place," Rick insisted, "because there is a spring in there, and

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because nobody would ever think of going down in there unless they knew the rope was there?"

"Maybe they would, for that reason, but I wouldn't want to live in an icebox, even in summer, would you?" I asked him.

"No," he said; "but he could have a fire down there, and we don't know how much of a cave there is. Maybe there's more room under the rocks than shows there by that hole, and maybe they could fix it up for him."

That didn't seem very likely to me, but I got more curious than ever to try right away to see if we could get inside by way of the brook, and see what was in there. So I didn't say any more, but just got down into the water again and waded to the opening.

The stones were smooth all over, as if they had been washed by the water for a long time, and higher up than they were wet now. When I put my hand on one of them, and stooped down to look into the black hole behind them, I tell you the strangeness of it made me sort of wish that it

was lighter in there, anyway. But I knew how I would feel afterwards, if I didn't go on now, whether Rick ever told the other boys or not, so I just asked him if he was coming, and then I started to crawl in.

I had a lot of matches in my pocket, but I was a little afraid to light any at first. I hadn't been inside a minute, though, before I knew I couldn't get along without them, for I felt every second as if I was going to knock my head or step into a deep pool or lose hold of the side wall. Just as soon as I passed the first rocks, I found there was more room, too, and I could stand up straight, though I didn't do it till I had reached up to feel for the roof.

Rick came to the opening in the rocks, just as soon as I stepped in, and he blocked out what little light might have come in that way, so I didn't try to take another step without striking a match. I got one out and scratched it. It was one of those with the noiseless heads, you know, so it didn't make a racket. And when the flame flared up I saw all around me quite plainly.

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There were a lot of rocks piled up together, leaning against each other, but with space enough there at the beginning, so that you could hardly reach from one side to the other with your arms stretched out. They were dark-gray and brown rock, and seemed to be pretty dry. The light of the match showed sort of dull on them, and they would have looked bright if they had been wet. Between them the brook was flowing along in a little sand bed, with room enough at one side, right there, for you to step out of the water. I was glad of that, too, for the water seemed colder than ever in there.

Rick came in after me when he saw the match-light, and before the first one went out, he was standing beside me on the sand bank. In the darkness that came the instant I dropped the burnt end of the match, we both felt strange. He reached out and took hold of my hand, and we talked in whispers. I was half ready to make some kind of an excuse then to get out of going on, but something made me stick to it.

"We can't burn just matches, Rick," I said, "for they won't last long, and we can't really get very far with them." But I lighted another, just the same, and began to walk on carefully along the sand floor of the cave with Rick following. It led right straight in for a little ways, and we walked eight or ten feet, I guess, before we came to a place where it turned just square to the left, with the flat side of a rock standing right at the corner in front of us. We stopped there a minute, and burned two or three more matches, looking around to see how the rocks were placed. I was a little afraid some of them might fall on us or behind us, as you hear about their falling in mines. But they all looked solid as could be, except some little ones that lay on the sand and which looked as if they had been there a long time.

The passage through which the stream came was a little lower than the first one, and was dark as could be, too. I looked back towards the entrance where we had got in, and it showed quite a

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clear light when we weren't burning matches, so I knew we couldn't be very near to the other opening of the cave, or we could see light from there, too.

"It is that it is pretty scary," Rick whispered.

"Yes," I said; "but we're all right so far. Let's go on a little."

So we crept forward again, still finding sand enough to walk on without stepping in the water very much. And we made another little distance, not much more than the first.

To think that we were now away inside those rocks we had been on top of that day, and that we hadn't any idea what sort of place we might find ahead of us, except that we were sure the opening led into the deep well-like place where the money was hidden, made us stop talking and sort of hold our breath. A fresh match showed us that there was another turn, to the right this time, just ahead, and it made me a little bit discouraged, because I thought maybe the way was going to be very crooked indeed, and perhaps so

long that we wouldn't dare go through it all. It's a good deal harder to go into a place like that than you'd think, until you try it, but Rick was so game, following me now without a fuss, that I wouldn't for the world stop till I knew all I could find out.

Well, we were quite a while about it, but we passed that second turn of the brook, and then through a short sort of round place, where we had to step into the water again and where it got so deep that we only dared go ahead by feeling as far as we could along the sand before taking a step. But it only came up to our knees, and we crossed and found good sand again on the other side. And then there was a sudden little turn in the rocks to the left and to the right again, and all at once the roof came down so far that we thought maybe it would touch the water somewhere in the darkness ahead.

But all at once, as the match I was burning just then gave out, I saw a light of another kind on the brook ahead, where one jagged rock stuck out

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into it, and, going forward slowly, I stooped down and looked out into a wide, open, daylight place, all filled with water and almost surrounded with rocks. And, in one second, I was certain that was the big hole we'd seen first. And, as I stood there listening, I heard a sound of splashing, as if somebody or some animal out there was working or playing in the water.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAN WHO CLIMBED

I TURNED around to Rick to warn him to keep very still and listen, but I found that he had heard just what I had, and so we both stood there in the cold brook and bent down, looking and listening.

The rocks came down within about a foot of the water, I think, at the place where the outside pool commenced, and we had to bend about double to see at all. I stooped and got my trousers all wet trying to see better. But all we could tell from there was that we must surely be looking out into the big hole, as we began to call it, and that something seemed to be making splash after splash out in the middle or at the farther side.

I wanted to get clear down where I could get a

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good look from under the edge of the rocks, for we seemed to be pretty safe from sight, in where we were, but the water was so cold I knew we couldn't stand it more than a second or two longer, so I didn't dare wade to the very edge. We'd been in the water now so much that I was almost afraid it might hurt us. My feet ached clear in to the bones, and it seemed as if I'd just got to get out of it. And just when I was ready to move back, Rick pulled my arm and whispered that he couldn't stand it either.

Well, I was afraid to strike another match right there, so we had to feel our way back along the rocks without a light, and we were in the water a lot more than was any fun before we got to the first sand to stand on. Rick was about ready to cry, I know, when I lighted a match at last, holding my hand between it and the opening to the big hole. When I saw how bad he felt I got down on the sand and rubbed his feet with my hands to help get them warm. And mine got warm while I was doing it. Poor little chap! It did hurt, and he's littler than I am, and as game as he can be.

But I made up my mind that we must get out of there then, for it was no way to do, to try to find out anything more until we could manage it without hurting so much. So we talked a little about it, and then we started back.

"We'll keep still about this," I said. "It's an adventure we don't have to tell about now, and we'll come back and find out what those men are doing in that big hole. It's too good a place for them to leave unless they get scared. I don't believe they know anything about this cave, or, if they do, they think nobody else does. And we can get in here again, with some rubber boots or something, and we'll find a way to look at them."

"I wish the water wasn't so cold," Rick said. "Then we could undress and crawl to the edge of the opening to look out."

"Yes—but it is cold!" I answered, "and we'd maybe get cramps. We'll try again, though. Let's get out."

So we went back through the round chamber and along the passages and out to the sunlit open-

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ing where we had come in at first, going pretty quickly now, for it was much easier than the first trip, on account of our knowing the way and not being afraid of holes. And in a few minutes we were getting really warm again in the sun on our flat rock outside the entrance.

We didn't talk very loud, for we thought that probably the splashing in the pool at the big hole was made by somebody who might hear us. It wouldn't have been possible for anybody to see us, from the top of the rocks or from any other way, for the bushes were so thick that we were in a regular house of leaves, except on the side towards the river, which was lower than we were, and where the sun shone in now.

"What do you s'pose they are doing in that place?" Rick asked again.

"That's too hard a question for me," I answered, and I felt like laughing a little because we'd been so excited, and had a really pretty hard time in the cold water, and the sun was making me feel so much better.

"Do you s'pose they could possibly, maybe, have somebody they are keeping prisoner down in there?" Rick asked all at once.

"No," I said quickly. It startled me to think of that, but I couldn't imagine what made Rick think of such a thing.

"I kind of thought there might be some such thing, because if they are robbers they might have somebody they wanted to keep prisoner."

"Who?"

"Well, just s'pose they were some friends of Morse, and they had got Benedict instead of Morse, wouldn't they——"

"Gee!" I said, interrupting him. "You wouldn't hardly think they could do such a thing, would you? And, besides, Morse wasn't one of those men we saw."

"He might be around, just the same, mightn't he?"

I thought about that two or three minutes. If these men were Morse's friends, they must surely have Morse with them, but there wasn't any real

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reason to believe they were. Still, they were out here in the woods not so many miles from where Morse was supposed to have been, hiding money in a hole in the rocks. The splashing we had heard in the pool was surely not going on when we were up on the rocks looking in, though, and the more I thought about it, the less I believed any animal could have made it. For, in the first place, no animal would live in a place where men came very often, as these men must come, I guessed, from the way their rope was worn. In the second place, that splashing had sounded more as if something was being thrown into the water than as if an animal was drinking or swimming around or playing. Somebody was there, I was sure, and it might be somebody who was being kept down there or somebody who had come back there while we had been gone.

Well, while we were sitting there and thinking, I happened to look down at the brook below us, and I noticed that the water was, all at once, running quite roily. It seemed to be all stirred up,

and full of mud. I couldn't understand, for there was mostly good sand bottom, both outside the cave and inside, and our wading certainly couldn't have made all this difference.

I watched it for quite a few moments, and I could see that the mud came out with the water from the cave, and, all at once, the idea that somebody was following us from the pool, and stirring up all this dirt, came over me so hard that I just grabbed hold of Rick and showed it to him.

"Rick," I said, "somebody's coming through the cave! See how roiled up the water is!"

He looked, and then we both jumped up quick. But I knew if anybody was coming we couldn't get away down through the creek, for it would be slow going unless we made a lot of noise and took a chance of hurting our feet pretty bad on the stones. So I just turned and jumped right off that rock into the bushes behind it, and in a second Rick followed me, and we lay perfectly still where we landed among the weeds and grass, with

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the brush so thick all around that we couldn't see a thing.

Well, we listened and waited and listened and waited. We could hear the noise of the brook against the stones, and the singing of the crickets and the little chirping of the birds, but we couldn't hear anything else. We were where we couldn't see the opening into the cave now, and I believe you couldn't see it from any way except from the brook itself, so we couldn't depend on our eyes. And there we sat and sat and sat, hardly daring to breathe, and waiting, expecting any minute to hear somebody splash out of the cave. I looked up at the top of our rock pretty often, for I felt all the time as if somebody might be looking over it and down on us. But nothing came at all, and there wasn't even the cracking of a stick or rustling of the leaves to make things any less still.

It got me mighty nervous after a while, though, and I just had to do something, so at last I began to get up very slowly and carefully, trying not to make a noise. But it was impossible not to

make the twigs crack and the leaves and branches scrape against me, so finally I gave up being so quiet and just stood up and looked across the rock. It came up about to my chin on that side, and so I could not see the brook itself, and I climbed up at once and looked over the other side and at the cave entrance.

It was just as still as ever, and nobody was there, but the water was muddy as ever, too. I couldn't understand it, for we had been behind the rock long enough for anyone to come through the cave twice, if anyone had been there, or we might have got away down the creek in the same time if we had decided to go that way.

I was still afraid that somebody was inside the cave, though, and so I lay still there and listened again a minute. Then all at once I thought it was no use to stay there, because it might be that the mud in the stream came from way back in the pool itself where we'd heard the splashing, so I motioned to Rick, and we climbed over and down into the stream again.

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We'd got pretty warm by that time, and we knew about how far we had to go and where the best footing was, so we hurried out and got along faster than we had come up, a good deal, and, though we looked back every minute or so, we didn't see anybody or anything but the leaves and the trees and the rocks and the water. So we got to where we'd left our shoes and stockings, and we put them on and were all ready to start for camp in just a few minutes.

And then came the queerest part of all that queer day's adventures. We went down the hill, through whatever open places we could find among the trees, not trying to follow the stream, because it made so many long jumps or falls. And pretty soon we were down at the river bank, where the trees were more open and we could go fast, and we walked as fast and as straight as we could toward where we had left our boat.

It took us quite a while to get there, and it was beginning to get towards sunset by the time we reached the place where we had tied up that morn-

ing. It was a little, low, cove kind of place where we had thought the boat would be out of sight from the river, and where we could safely leave it. But when we got nearer to the shore of the little inlet, Rick, who was ahead just then, stopped so suddenly that I ran right into him, and when I looked ahead, where he was pointing, I saw a very queer-looking person standing down beside where our boat was tied.

I suppose it was because we were both so full of thought about the men we'd seen and the cave and all that we were afraid of this man, too, for it was a man. He stood with his back towards us, and we couldn't even see what he looked like, except that he was not a very big man. But he was looking all around him on the ground, as if he had lost something, and from where we stood, upon the bank above him, he seemed to be examining the tracks in the mud at the water side.

I knew he couldn't be one of the men from the big rocks after I'd looked at him a minute, for he wasn't tall enough for the tall one, nor short

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enough for the short one, nor fat enough for the fat one, and his clothes were different from any of them. He had on some old sort of overall-looking clothes, and looked very rough indeed. And on his legs were some queer-looking things, strapped on, and we didn't know what they were then. But while we stood there looking, not really knowing whether we wanted to go down where he was or not, he suddenly dropped down on a little knoll of grass and began to measure one of the tracks on the shore with a stick and to compare it with the size of his own foot. And we thought we understood the things on his legs then, for they looked like ankle braces.

It seemed so queer to us how he looked and what he was doing that Rick and I made up our minds to watch some more, and we drew back behind a tree. And then, while the man went on measuring and looking, and measuring and looking, and measuring again, we stood there and wondered.

But pretty soon he got up from his place and

climbed into the boat, examining it all over, inside and out, even finding the fishline under the front seat and looking at that. But he put everything back, just as it had been, acting as if he wanted to be careful not to leave it disturbed, and then he slowly walked around the cave to the other side.

When he looked back from the other side, though, we both found out something we hadn't seen before, and that was that he was a colored man. It seemed funny to me afterwards that we hadn't noticed before, but I suppose that was because he wasn't very black, and we had only seen his hands and the back of his neck.

Well, he stood there looking and looking, and seemed to be waiting. And he looked up at the woods all around and out on the water and up at the sun, which was getting pretty low down now towards setting. And we thought he never would move again. But, after a long while, he seemed suddenly to think of something, and he turned and climbed up the bank opposite us, pretty quick,

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and next minute he began to climb a tree that stood near the edge. And then we knew in a second what the things on his legs were. They were climbing-irons, like telephone men have in the city. They have sharp points you can stick into a pole or a tree, and which hold you up so you can climb very fast. And he went up the tree as easy as could be. In another minute he was up among the leaves and out of sight, and you wouldn't have known that he was there at all, if you hadn't seen him climb up.

But after he was up there, he suddenly kept so still that we didn't know what to make of it, until I thought that the reason he had gone was just so that he could watch who would come to the boat. And then I whispered to Rick that we might just as well go, for we couldn't stay there. And it wouldn't hurt us to have him just see us. So, after a few minutes, we walked out on the bank and went down to the boat, acting as if we hadn't seen him at all and didn't know he was there.

CHAPTER VII

A MANY-SIDED PUZZLE

I THINK when you know a person is hidden away somewhere near and is watching you it is very hard to act as if you didn't know it. I've tried it when we were playing games or something like that. But when we knew that the negro in the tree must have climbed up there to watch and find out who owned the boat, and when we felt that he was looking down on us from up there among the thick leaves, it was all Rick and I could do to be natural.

We got the boat ready to push off into the water and untied her painter, and Rick had climbed in before I realized that we were keeping as still as if it were we who were hiding instead

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of the man in the tree, and that, if we didn't talk some, he would suspect we had seen him. So I commenced with the first thing that came into my head.

"Rick," I said, quite loud, looking around, "isn't this about the loneliest place you ever saw?"

Rick looked at me quickly, with his eyes opening up wide, but I winked at him, and he understood pretty easily.

"Yes," he said then, standing up and looking around, too. "It doesn't seem as if anybody ever came here, does it?"

"I don't believe anybody does very much," I answered. "There's nothing to come for."

I pushed the boat out into the water and climbed in. Rick sat down by the rudder and I put the oars in the rowlocks and commenced to row easy and as if I wasn't in a bit of a hurry.

"Next time we'll go across over on to the other side," Rick said.

Neither of us looked up at the tree for quite a while, until we were pretty well out into the river,

and then, when I did look, I couldn't see anything at all among the branches.

"Wasn't that a funny thing?" I said to Rick in a low voice. "He was trying to track somebody."

"Yes," answered Rick. "He's hunting for someone, I am thinking. Did you look at the tracks in the mud?"

"No. I was afraid to. I thought he'd suspect that we'd seen him."

"You wouldn't think he'd be measuring our tracks, would you?"

"I don't know. Why should he measure any at all?"

"That seems very queer. If it was he was trying to trace somebody and had the size of his boots, he might measure the tracks to see if they could be made by that person."

"Yes. But maybe he made a lot of tracks himself around our boat before he noticed any others, and was just trying to find out which were his, by comparing the size with his own boots."

Rick laughed. "You think of the things that

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have a reason," he said in his funny way of twisting words up. "That is, of course, just what he was doing. And he probably climbed up in the tree so as to hide better than he could on the ground, while he could also see better."

"I guess so," I said.

I had rowed pretty well out of the mouth of the river into the lake now, and we were not afraid of being heard. I was full of excitement over everything that had happened, and I could see that Rick felt just as I did. He could hardly sit still. I didn't know just what I ought to do, though. I didn't know sure that there was anything wrong about either the men we'd seen on the rocks or the negro man, and yet we couldn't feel any way but very suspicious about it. I was wondering if I ought to tell somebody right away, and get somebody to go with us back to the cave and try to get a good look at the big hole in the rocks, or maybe to catch the men there and find out what they were doing. I wished Captain Benson was where I could tell him quick all about

it, and I was thinking whether I hadn't better write to him right away, when Rick asked me a question that gave me a lot of new thoughts.

"Do you think, Witter, that negro could have been a detective in disguise, looking for the men we saw?"

Well, that seemed possible, right away.

"He might have been, of course," I said, "if the men on the rocks had done anything out of the way."

"Don't you think they are robbers?"

"We can't possibly tell. They had a lot of money there, and I can't see why they'd be hiding it unless there was something wrong about it."

"They didn't come down the hill towards our boat, so it couldn't have been their tracks there which the negro was looking at," said Rick.

"No," I answered. "But he might have been looking for them, just the same."

"Maybe he was looking for somebody else."

"Perhaps."

"He might be, perhaps, one of their gang even,

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on guard down at the river bank because they feared they might be followed."

"Yes, he might be that, too."

"Or he might be somebody that hadn't anything to do with them in any way. It's funny he had those climbing-irons."

"He might be just a linesman putting a farmer's telephone line through the woods along the river," I said, beginning to think maybe we were getting sort of foolish about it all.

"Yes," said Rick, but he suddenly turned and looked at me with his eyes just burning. "And he might have been an officer looking in these woods for the man Morse."

I jumped, I guess, because that idea hadn't even occurred to me, and in that second I made up my mind that Rick and I hadn't any business to keep still about all these queer things, and to try to find out for ourselves about such men, no matter how much I wanted to do something I could crow about.

"Rick!" I said, "I guess I will write to Captain

Benson just as soon as we get home and tell him everything we've seen, because these men maybe ought to be followed and caught, and we won't know how to do it right, and we may just do something foolish or get hurt, or only warn them to get away. It's just as likely that the negro belongs to that gang in the rocks as it is that he's searching for them, and it's just as likely that he may be a friend of Morse as it is that he is tracking him. I know it would be foolish for us not to tell what we've seen."

"Mr. Lally?" asked Rick.

"No. I know what he'd do. He'd tell the town marshal at Frayne, and maybe then we wouldn't get any credit, or Captain Benson, either. I'll write to Captain Benson."

I wasn't very well satisfied with any of the ideas we had thought of about the negro, but the thing Rick had said, about his being possibly after Morse, seemed to stick in my mind. I had really come to believe that Morse wasn't in that part of the country at all, but I began to think that if any-

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one was still trying to follow him up there in the woods, there must be some good reason for believing he was there. Somehow, I sort of came to the idea that it must be true that this man was at least trying to follow Morse, and then I began to believe that perhaps he might be the very man who had been sent by Captain Benson to see Flora and who was not out in the woods just looking for the escaped prisoner.

Well, Rick and I talked and talked about it all, but we couldn't decide what we believed, and when we got away down the lake to the camp, the only thing we were sure about was that we would not tell any of the boys, but that I would just write to Captain Benson, and see what he said.

"But it won't do any hurt for us to go up to the cave again," I said, because I didn't want to give up the chance of knowing all we could, and it was as exciting as it could be to think of spying on the men there.

So, when we had had supper that night, I went away from the rest, into the tent where I slept,

and wrote a letter to Captain Benson and told him all about what had happened to us that day. Rick stayed with Mr. Lally and the boys, so that they wouldn't think we were trying to keep anything from them. They had asked us some questions about where we'd been that day, but we hadn't told them much, and had made them believe we hadn't had much fun, which was true, too. And I marked the envelope "Personal" for him, too, so nobody but he would read it.

Before I got my letter done, though, one of the boys came in, and brought two letters for me. We had our mail all sent to the Little Fern Hotel, which was not very far from where we were camping, and he had been down to get whatever there was.

One of the letters was from my Aunt Margaret Whitehead, asking me when I would be coming down to her farm, and how long we were going to camp, and I didn't think it was of any great importance then, though it turned out to be in a very strange way. The other letter was from Flora, and I will write that here just as it was.

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“DEAR WITTER: Since your letter came I have not heard from Morse. Captain Benson sent a man up here and he tried putting a note out where I was told to put it, and watching to see who came. But no one came, and he decided that some of the old gang who knows me had tried to make people believe Morse was up here, when he is really somewhere else. I’ve got some more startling news for you, though I’m not so much frightened as I was. The papers say that Benedict has disappeared from the place where he had been living in the city. It happened several days ago. You know he had promised the police that he wouldn’t leave the city, and he had to report every little while. Well, he’s gone, and they found his room in the house where he lived, all torn up, as if there had been a struggle in it—as if he’d had an awful fight there with somebody, and, of course, they all believe Morse must have come there. I don’t know what to think.

“I would be frightened for father and Fred, if I thought anybody knew where they are. They

kept it secret when they went South to work this summer, though.

"I wish you would come over and see me. I'd like to talk about a lot of things that seem queer to me. Can't you ride over from camp, on the car or a horse or in a carriage or something, just for a day?

Your friend,

"FLORA MIDGELY."

Well, it made me feel sort of scared again to read that letter. To think that Morse could keep from getting caught for such a long time, and to be uncertain where he might turn up at any minute, was bad enough. But to be pretty sure that he had at least made one try to be revenged on Benedict just made me shiver. I could imagine what a terrible man Morse would be, and I couldn't help thinking that he had almost as much reason to hate me as he had to hate Benedict. I remembered the time when he was first captured by the policeman with Mr. Benson after I had given the news of where he was. I rode in the

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same patrol wagon with Morse when he was taken to the station, and he looked at me in such a queer way. And I remembered again, too, how he used to laugh—such a disagreeable laugh—a sort of horrible way, so quiet and as if he wasn't really feeling like laughing at all. And I sat there in the tent and felt so lonesome that I got out pretty soon and went over to the beach where the boys were sitting around a fire listening to Mr. Lally tell stories.

I wish I could tell about all the fun the boys had that camping time, and all the other things that were going on besides the adventures Rick and I were having. But it would take too long, so I'll just have to tell what happened.

Well, I told Rick about what Flora had written, that night, and he said it would be a good scheme for me to go over to the Frayne Lake Sanitarium, where she was, the very next day, so as to talk with her and find out all the queer things she had mentioned, while we were waiting to hear from Captain Benson. And, after we had thought

about that a little, we decided I should do it. So the next morning I told Mr. Lally what I wanted to do. He was willing I should go, but, better than that, he had a dandy surprise for me, too.

"You can ride a pony, can't you?" he asked me, when I told him that the place I meant to go to was only about twelve or fourteen miles away.

I answered yes, of course, because I had ridden a pony a little that year at school, and he knew it. Two or three of us boys used to go out riding for fun on livery-stable ponies at St. Croix, and of course Mr. Lally had seen us.

"Well, there's a good pony or two in the barn at Little Fern Hotel. You could just as well get one as not."

I was mighty glad about that, and made up my mind to ride. And I would have asked Rick to go, too, but he doesn't like to ride horseback. So I went and got a pony with Mr. Lally, and got ready to start just as soon after breakfast as I could. He was a fine little black fellow, not so small as a Shetland, but not very big—just right,

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I thought. And he was gentle, too, and could run besides.

You know how it feels to get on horseback when you haven't been for a ride for quite a while. It just sort of thrills you to feel the pony's body move under you and to know that he's alive and strong and can go. And it's so nice to feel that you can manage him and make him go where you want him to, and that, if you're good to him, he'll do almost anything you want. This little fellow was a dandy, and I didn't really need the whip I took at all.

Well, I started. There were two roads I could take, the one that led down the valley through the woods, above the river, which was the shortest, and one which went along the very top of the bluffs above the ravine and which was two miles longer. I made up my mind to go along the high road, as they called it, because I could see much farther, and it wouldn't be so lonely. I thought I might come back the other way, though, because I was kind of curious to ride somewhere

near where the rocks in the woods were. They couldn't be so very far below the woods road, as people called that way, and I just wanted to know if possibly I could find out something more about them.

I didn't carry any lunch, because I would get some at Frayne. I could easily ride over in two hours if I went right along, and it was only eight when I started, but Mr. Lally gave me some money, because he was keeping mine for me, to buy lunch and feed for the pony, and to have a little besides if I should need it. And that was how I happened to get into a new adventure that ended more strangely than the one the day before.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE WOODS ROAD

Nothing much happened for the first hour I was out on my way, and the riding was fine, but the first queer thing that came to me was when I stopped in front of a little country store at a cross-road, to give the pony a drink.

It was a little bit of a place, and there were only two houses besides the store at the cross-roads. But when I rode up there were four or five men talking out under the board awning over the sidewalk. As I pulled the pony up to the horse-trough, one of the men turned to look at me. He was a farmer, I guess, and I never have seen him before or since that time. But he seemed to be interested in me the minute he looked at me,

for he turned and said something to the others, and in a second they all looked at me, too.

It was sort of embarrassing, but I drove the pony up to the trough and let him get his nose into the water, trying not to pay any attention to them. When I looked up again, though, one man was coming over towards me, and the second I looked at him I was startled, for he was a negro, and somehow he reminded me right away of the colored man we had seen the day before. I suppose it must have been his clothes, for I hadn't been near enough to him to really remember just how his face looked. And he was holding a bank-bill in his hand and just ready to speak to me.

As I looked into his face, though, a queer sort of thing happened. He had been laughing, as negroes always seem to do so much, and when he saw my face his laugh just went away quick, and he almost stopped still, instead of coming on, and made a funny noise with his lips, as if he was astonished to see me.

It was hard for me to look at him, for I was

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sure he remembered me as one of the boys he had seen the day before. But why he should be startled, I couldn't guess, because I didn't think he knew that Rick and I had seen him. In a minute, though, I thought perhaps if he was a detective, as I was pretty near sure, he might have some reason for being sorry that I should see him here at this place, because of some plan he had or because he wasn't really certain we hadn't seen him climb the tree in the woods.

But he came on with his grin coming back, in just a minute, and then he began to talk to me in a way that explained his funny manner, partly.

"Why, excuse me, boss," he said, calling me boss just as he might a man, "but I seen you before somewhere, ain't I?"

I can't write it just as he said it, because I don't know how, but anybody knows how a negro talks who hasn't been to school. But I was getting surer and surer that he was a detective every minute, because everything put together made me think so. So I answered in a way that would let

him know, I thought, that I had seen him the day before, but wouldn't tell anybody.

"Yesterday?" I asked.

His face sobered again a little, and he looked at me queerer than ever, but he shook his head. "No," he said. "Not yesterday, unless you come a long ways, too, boss. 'Cause I was a good many miles away from here yesterday. Maybe you lived down to the city last year, though," he added. "I think I done work for your pa."

"Oh!" I said. I didn't know what to say to that, for I knew it wasn't so, of course. If he was a real negro, or if he wasn't our officer, then I was sure I never saw him at home. But if he was disguised, then I couldn't tell who he was. I thought all at once that he might be Captain Benson himself, but I knew he couldn't be, as I looked at him, because he wasn't nearly so strong-looking.

"Would you mind telling me your name, boss?" he asked me, in a minute. "I sure seem to remember you."

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"My name's Witter Whitehead," I said, "and I live in the city." Then I thought of another idea to let him know what I was thinking, so that he would understand, if he was a detective, and so that it wouldn't mean anything to him if he wasn't.

"I'm a friend of Captain Benson's," I said.

He grinned again, and then he stood looking at me queerly for quite a long second. Then, all at once, he seemed to remember something, and he held out the bill he had in his hand.

"I'm tryin' to get change for this, boss," he told me. "Would you happen to have it by you?"

It was a two-dollar bill, I could see now, and I could change it, for I had about four or five dollars in my pocket, and some of it was in halves and quarters. So I said yes right away. Just then, though, the pony finished drinking and raised his head and turned as if he wanted to go on, so I had to hold up the lines. As I did that, the negro put his hand out so quick, and caught hold of the reins so suddenly, that it

seemed as if he must have thought I was trying to get away. But he laughed again in a second.

"Thought he was goin' to run with you, boss," he said, to excuse himself.

The pony stood still then, and so I took my money out and gave him two halves and four quarters for his bill. All the time, though, I was wondering if maybe I ought not to try again to find out sure who he was, and then, if he turned out to be Captain Benson's man, to tell him the things I knew. But when he had turned the silver over in his hand once or twice, he just let go of the bridle and stepped back.

"Thanks, boss," he said. "These gentlemen didn't seem to have the two dollars with 'em to-day," waving his hand at the farmers who had been watching us all the time. And then, when I thought that would sort of make them mad, they all just laughed, and looked at me, as if I'd done something that was funny. I couldn't see what it was, but I was quite a little embarrassed now, for I didn't know what to make of the way the

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negro acted. So I just got sort of mad myself, and started the pony. And next minute I was galloping off down the road.

Well, by the time I got to Frayne, I didn't care any more about the farmers laughing, but I had thought a lot of things about the negro. The way he had looked at me and asked me my name made me believe pretty strongly that he had seen me at home, sometime when I had been at the police station with Captain Benson. I couldn't understand at all about the two dollars, unless he had just been trying to change it as an excuse for asking questions of the farmers, and then had had to ask me, because one of them had suggested I might be able to change it. Of course they knew I must be a resorter, as they call people who come to the lakes for vacations, and so I supposed they thought it was a joke to make me change the money for a negro.

I found Flora at the sanitarium. It was a pretty place, like a hotel, right on the high bank above Lake Frayne, and on the edge of the little

town called Frayne. There was a stable there where I could put up the pony, and I did, and then Flora and I went and sat on the porch to talk over things till lunch time.

When I first knew Flora Midgely, she was a little lame girl, as I told about in the story of the silver thieves. She had to go on crutches then, but now she was just about well, after her operation, and after staying a long time at this sanitarium where Mr. Fleming had sent her. She was a mighty nice girl, too, and she thought I was her best friend, because we'd had the other adventure together.

So that day I told her right away about everything that had happened, and she was as much interested as anybody could be, for she knew Morse and Benedict and all the rest of the gang well, because they tried to get her father into trouble so he would have to join them, you know, and he and Flora did live in the same house with them at one time.

But after I had told her all that had happened

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to me, and all the things I had thought, she told me some things, too, and they fitted in so queerly with my story that I was astonished.

"I've seen that negro," she said, when I had got all through my story. It was like her to keep still about such a thing till I had finished all I had to say. "He came here to see me once, after the officer Captain Benson sent had gone."

"He did? Then he *is* the detective!"

"Why do you think so?"

"Because I think he's probably disguised himself so as to look around for Morse."

"Well, but listen," said Flora. "Did I tell you about how the note came to me from Morse—or the one I thought was from Morse? It was signed L. M., and was in his writing, or so much like it I believed it was his."

"No, you didn't tell me. I wondered about that, too."

"Well, a negro brought it to the sanitarium and left it for me, one day when I was out. I didn't see him, and the clerk who received the note

couldn't tell me anything except that the man was a negro."

Well, that made me feel queer, in spite of the fact that I knew there must be other negroes—perhaps a good many in that neighborhood, besides the one I'd seen.

"But what did he come for, after the detective had gone?" I asked her.

"He brought me a note from the detective telling me not to worry, and that Morse had left this part of the country, if he was ever here."

I just stared when she told me that. I certainly couldn't understand at all. If the negro was the detective he couldn't have been the one who brought Morse's note. If he was Morse's man, he couldn't have brought the note from the detective. There must surely be two different negroes. And yet it seemed very strange.

"You saw him the second time he came?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered, "if it was the second time—if he was the same negro who came the first time."

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I was getting sort of confused, but I thought maybe I understood.

"Maybe it's all a clever game of the detective, from the very beginning," I said.

"I really believe it is," Flora answered.

"But I think you'd better write it all to Captain Benson, just as I wrote all about what happened to me," I told her. "He would know right away just what is the real truth, and he ought to know everything that happens."

Well, we talked about that, and I told her all the things I had written to Captain Benson, and how I had marked the letter "Personal," and so she said she would write that very night, and tell him everything that had happened to her, and all that she thought it meant, too.

We had dinner together at the sanitarium, and we walked around and looked at all the pretty places out at Frayne, and I took Flora for a boat ride on the lake in the afternoon, and we had a good time. At four o'clock, though, I thought I'd better start back home, and so I said good-by and went and got the pony.

I paid for keeping the pony and for his feed, and started out feeling fine, and I was so much interested in all we'd been talking about that I was eager to ride home by the woods road. I wasn't afraid, for I didn't believe that anybody would have any reason to suspect that I knew anything about the men in the rocks or Morse or anybody else, and, of course, there wouldn't be a reason why any of these men should bother me unless they thought I knew about them. Besides, I thought it was about impossible that I would have a chance of seeing them.

But I didn't know all the things that could happen, and I galloped down into the shady woods road, just as jolly as I had started out that morning, and having just as much fun. And I rode half way home without anything happening at all that was out of the ordinary.

But as I got to the place which I thought must be near a point above the rocks in the woods, I got more curious than ever over them, and wished and wished I could find out something more by

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myself. And the more I thought about it the more I wanted to try. I knew I ought not to do anything that would be dangerous or that might alarm the men in the rocks if they should happen to catch me. But when I remembered the cave and how easy it had been for Rick and me to get in there and look into the pool, I had a great notion to try it.

I hadn't decided just what I would do, and was just thinking it over, when I came to a place in the woods where a path turned off and went down the hill at a slant that made it not too steep for the pony, and, all at once, I just turned his head that way, saying to myself that I would ride a little ways, anyhow, and maybe just find a place where I could get a look through the trees at that gully and the rocks.

I sort of thought that the path I went into must be the one that led down to the gully, because it was the only path I'd seen since I came into the woods. I knew there wouldn't be any path where Rick and I had come up from the river, unless

people came up that way, and so I knew there must be an end to that path somewhere on the woods road, and I was sure this was it.

Well, I hadn't ridden very far through the trees when I heard somebody on the path ahead of me, and pretty soon I saw two men coming. I didn't know who they were at first, I think, but before I'd looked at them more than a minute, I did, and then I would have turned around and galloped back to the road mighty quick if I could.

It was so foolish of me to show that I was afraid, that I'm always ashamed of it now, but it's part of the story, so I can't leave it out, even if it was fair to do it. The minute I recognized the men in the path, and saw them look up at me, I just reined up the pony quick as could be. I must have just looked scared all over, too, I guess, for the men seemed to see right away that I was acting queer, and I guess that made them suspicious.

Of course you can guess who they were—the tall man and the short, strong one, whom we had

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seen on the rocks, and they both stopped and stood still, too, when they looked at me.

But I was slow to think what I could do, and didn't do anything, and they were quick, and acted right away. In a minute the tall man had come up to the pony, and was looking up at me sharp and hard, and his hand went slowly out and took hold of the pony's bridle while he looked. And then—oh, I just shiver now, as I remember I looked down into his face, and in that second I knew him—in spite of his close-shaved beard that used to be long and gray, and in spite of his close-cut hair that had been curly, I knew him. It was Benedict—the old man of the curiosity store, who had been one of Morse's gang of silver thieves, and for whom Morse was now believed to be hunting for revenge.

CHAPTER IX

OLD ENEMIES

I DON'T believe I can tell how I felt. The man's face was all gray and pale, and he looked sort of sick, but his eyes were so bright that they seemed as if they just looked straight inside of me and could see everything I was thinking about, as well as the things in my face. And I noticed such queer things about him, too. His beard had commenced to grow again a little, and the whiskers were all stiff, gray, little bristles all around his chin and up on the sides of his cheeks, and even around his neck. And while he looked up at me he put his hand up and ran his fingers all around his mouth, as if he was gathering the whiskers together to pull them, and his hand sort of stopped

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at his chin, as if it was disappointed because it didn't find anything to pull. And the white parts of his eyes were all lined with little fine lines of red—bloodshot, father says people call it—as if he was awfully tired.

It was a scary-looking face, that I can see as plain as can be now when I try. I couldn't help showing that I knew him any more than if he had been Rick, and I sort of jumped away from his hand, because I couldn't help that, either.

"What's the matter?" he asked me, and that was the first thing he said after he had stood there watching me for a minute.

It was very hard to answer him, for I knew my voice was going to shake before I spoke. I was scared, but that wasn't the only reason, and I don't know why I did shake so inside. But I tried awfully hard to talk right up as if I wasn't afraid.

"Nothing," I answered him. "What's the matter with you?"

"Don't get smart," he answered. "Where are you going?"

"Doesn't this road go through to the river?" I asked. I hardly knew what I was saying, but I was trying just to answer something that would sound all right.

"No," he said. "It doesn't—and no horse can go down much farther than this."

"Oh!" I said. "I'll turn around again, then."

I couldn't look in his eyes any longer, for I knew him so well, and so many things I remembered about him were running through my mind that I was sure he would know. And in a minute he let me know that he did.

"What are you trembling about?" he asked, and he put his hand on mine on the bridle.

I drew away quick. "You let me alone!" I exclaimed, just sort of hollering it out at him, because I couldn't hold in. And then, all at once, I just got desperate, for I couldn't imagine what he'd do to me there alone in the woods. And I gathered up the loose ends of my bridle and just dug my heels into the pony as sudden as I could, and just wild to get away.

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And the pony jumped like anything. You know a riding-horse will jump if you dig your heels into his sides suddenly like that, and this little pony was lively. He made a jump first and then he tried to pull his head away from Benedict. And then, when the man wouldn't let go, he backed out of the path and jerked his head and started to try to stand up on his hind feet.

But Benedict held on, and just the minute the fuss started the other man made a quick little run and in a second was at the other side of my bridle.

"What's the matter here?" he cried up at me as he grabbed the bit, and his strong hands held the pony down as if it had been just play.

"Whoa, boy! Whoa!" he said to the little fellow, and managed him as if he knew just how. "What's the matter with you?" he asked me again.

But I was too much frightened to think straight, and the only idea I had in the world was to get away.

"You let go of me!" I shouted, and I jerked

at the lines, and then, all at once, I leaned over and struck at Benedict with the whip I had, because I thought maybe he'd let go then. I don't know what I thought, really. I felt that I must just fight and strike and tear, and in a half a minute the pony was just the same, and he commenced to jump and jerk under me till I had to hang on to the saddle to keep from being thrown. And then, all at once, the short man made a leap at me and caught me by the coat and just dragged me out of the saddle and down to the ground, and I fell over and over among the leaves till my head hit hard against the root of a tree which stuck up, and I just turned sick all over.

Have you ever done anything like getting into a fuss over nothing, which you felt awfully bad about afterwards, but which you seemed unable to keep from getting into at the time? Well, just the minute that I knew my chance to get away was gone, I felt that I'd made an awful big mistake, and been more foolish than I'd ever been in my life. If I had succeeded in getting away I

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would have thought it was pretty smart, I guess, but I felt anything else but smart when I struck the ground so hard that it nearly took my breath away, and banged my head against the root so that my eyes saw queer things. People say they see stars when they hit their heads hard, but that isn't what it seems like to me. It seems as if water was splashing in front of my eyes, just as it does when you hit a pool with a flat stick, and it made me stop fighting right there, because I couldn't tell which way to fight.

I lay still after a second, because I didn't know what to do next, and then I heard the pony's feet just pounding around on the soft ground, and a great scramble and scratching among the leaves and sticks. And then, when it stopped, I opened my eyes, and there was Benedict bending over me, and there, a little ways away, was the other man holding still to the pony's bridle, and quieting him, now that I was off his back.

"You little rascal, you!" Benedict said to me.
"Get up!"

I couldn't get up very well for a second, for I was dizzy, and I just lay still and looked up at him. In a minute, though, he reached down and grabbed me, and pulled me up on my knees. And then he slapped me, right in the face, with his hand. "Get up!" he cried again, in a sort of snarling way.

Well, I got up, of course. There wasn't anything else to do.

"What did you do that for?" asked Benedict.

"You let me alone!" I said.

"What did you hit me for, you little duffer?" he asked. "I've a notion to knock your head against a tree!"

But he didn't do that. Instead, he reached down and took my chin in his fingers and forced me to look up at him, and then he just shook me, he was so mad. But he spoke to the other man.

"Do you know who this is?" he asked, and his voice told me that he was sort of scared and worried and mad all at once. "This is the little monkey that made all our trouble last year when

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Morse was taken." Then he looked down at me again. "And you remembered me, too, didn't you?" he said.

Of course he wouldn't have said that if he hadn't known that I did remember him, so I gave up then, and just stood still and looked up at him and waited. I didn't know what he would do. I couldn't even imagine, for I knew now that, whatever was being done down there in the rocks, with the money the men had hidden, it wasn't honest when he had anything to do with it. And when he asked me again if I knew him I just nodded, because there was no use pretending I didn't.

The man with the pony led the little fellow forward now, and stood looking at me, and the pony looked over his shoulder at me, too.

"Here's a pretty pass, Castle," said Benedict, acting as if he was just furious to have me on his hands. "What are we to do now? The boy knows me."

He looked down at me again.

"Where'd you come from?" asked the man Castle, looking me all over.

"I've been over at Frayne," I said, as well as I could, for I was all shaken up and could hardly talk.

"Where are you going?"

"Home," I said.

"You don't live up here," said Benedict.

"I live in the city," I answered. "I'm camping at Little Fern Lake."

"Why did you try to come down this path?" asked Benedict.

I just looked at him. I didn't want to say why, of course.

"Where are your folks?" asked Benedict.

"They're away."

"Where?"

I didn't know whether to tell or not, but it seemed foolish not to, and I thought I'd be better off now if I just told how things were, for then maybe they might not do anything to me.

"In England," I answered.

"England!" exclaimed Castle. "And you're camping up here alone? Don't lie."

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"I'm not," I answered.

"Who's with you at Little Fern Lake?" asked Benedict.

"Some boys."

"Who else?"

"Mr. Lally of St. Croix Academy," I said. I thought maybe that would make him a little bit careful, for I could see now that maybe he'd think there wasn't anybody there to take care of me. Perhaps he'd be more afraid to hurt me if he knew somebody'd be looking out for me.

But he only grunted. Then he commenced his questions again. "What did you go to Frayne for?"

"To see somebody."

"Who?"

I shook my head. I didn't want to tell about Flora. I didn't know just how much he might know about her, and I just thought I needn't tell. But the other man, who had commenced to tie the pony to a little tree, came over to me now, and leaning suddenly down he just put his hand in my

coat pocket, and I didn't dare move then, but just had to stand and let him search me. And that's what he did.

He went through by outside pockets first, while Benedict held my arm, and he didn't find anything, only a button-hook and a nickel and some salted peanuts I'd got that afternoon. Then he opened up my coat and looked in the inside pocket.

I hadn't thought about the letters I had there, but it was too late to think about them when he got his fingers on them, and in a second he had them out and was looking at them.

" 'Witter Whitehead,' " he said, reading one address out loud. " 'Little Fern Hotel, Little Fern Lake.' " Then he pulled out the letter, and, say! but it seemed to me the worst thing that could have happened, for it was Flora's last letter, and he and Benedict just read it together, standing there holding me, and scowling at it and making little exclamations that weren't swearing, but pretty near it. And they read it all through, and

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then they just stood and looked at each other and at me.

"You little runt, you!" said Benedict, after a while. "You've got us into a nice mess now, haven't you?"

But the other man, Castle, opened the other letter—the one from my Aunt Margaret—and read that. And when he finished he just handed it to Benedict.

"Now, see here," he said, taking hold of me. "You've got yourself into trouble, I can tell you that. For three cents I'd take you down and drop you into the river down here."

Benedict finished the letter and looked at me, too. "Or into the bottomless pool," he added.

They stood looking me over and over for quite a long minute. I didn't think they really meant what they said, but while I looked from one of their faces to the other I felt pretty bad, for I could see that they were scared because the thing had happened the way it had, and I knew that they would be afraid to let me go now that we'd

raised such a fuss. Then, all at once, the short man took Benedict by the arm.

"Let him stand alone a minute," he said. "If he runs, we'll catch him and put him into a rabbit hole, heels up. Let me talk to you."

Benedict looked doubtful for a second, but then he let go of my arm, and the two walked away from me a few feet. I didn't dare to try to run then, for I knew they could catch me if I tried to get up the path, and there wasn't any chance for me to get the pony loose and ride him away. So I had to stand still. And they stood close together between two bushes and began to talk quickly between themselves so I couldn't hear.

That was an awfully hard time for me to stand. I could have just dropped down on the leaves and cried mighty easy, for I was just about scared out of my life. I felt weak in my legs, and that choking feeling came to me again, with the tears just making my eyes hot. But I knew it wouldn't do any good to be a baby, so I bit my teeth just as hard as I could, and just stood still and waited.

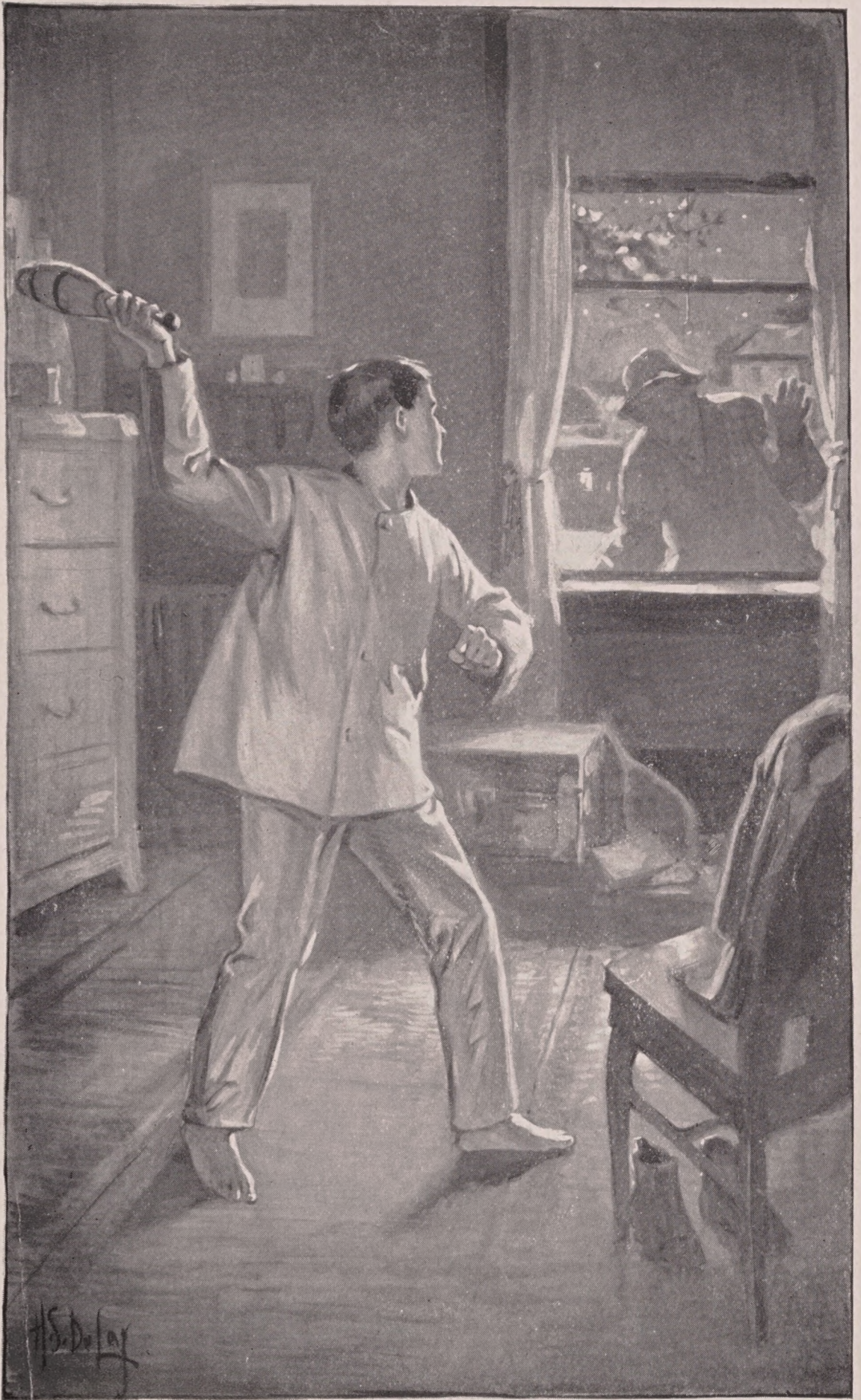
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And then, after they'd talked quite a few minutes, the men turned around and came back to me, and Castle commenced to untie the pony, while Benedict took hold of my arm. And they were so quiet I could have just yelled with fear of them.

"What are you going to do with me?" I said. And then I tried, all at once, to jerk away again. But Benedict held me tight and answered me.

"You keep still," he said, "and you won't get hurt. You're just going to visit your Aunt Margaret for a while. You're going to start for the farm earlier than you thought, that's all."

But he turned me around in the path, and next minute he gave me a push, and started me down through the woods. And I almost screamed out loud, as I suddenly thought that I knew where we were going.



I TURNED AND THREW IT AS HARD AS I COULD RIGHT
AT THE WINDOW." [Page 31.]

CHAPTER X

THE BOTTOMLESS POOL

THE path was a good deal steeper than I had expected it would be, and I felt so sick I could hardly walk. I could just imagine that dark, cold hole in the rocks where the men had hidden the money, and I was sure they were going to take me there, because there couldn't be any other place for them to take me. I did think that maybe they might go on down through to the river, but I couldn't imagine what they could do with me there, for I didn't believe they would dare hurt me.

But the first guess I made was the right one. They went to the rocks. The path led down to the gully, pretty near direct, and when we got to

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it I began to see what a very good place for hiding those rocks were. Nobody who was just going along the path, trying to get up from or down to the river, would ever think of turning off across the rocks on the rougher side of the gully the way Rick and I had gone when we tried to follow the hawk. It didn't look as if there was anything there at all except some big stones, with weeds and bushes and trees growing up all around. It was buried right in the heart of that rough, steep side hill, and I knew it was just about the best place that could be for a robber's den.

I hadn't any doubt at all now that the men were robbers, and I knew they were afraid to let me go after I had recognized Benedict. So I commenced to wonder how they would dare to keep me. But it was only too easy to think that they could put me down in the big hole, and keep me there till they could get away. Nobody but Rick and Flora and I knew anything about the hole in the rocks. Flora wouldn't know, of course, that I hadn't gone straight home safely, but Rick would miss

me right away that night. He might think I'd decided to stay over one night at Frayne, however. Mr. Lally would be likely to make a fuss, though, and maybe he'd go and call up the Frayne Sanitarium and ask about me.

I knew I'd be missed pretty quick—by evening, anyway. But that didn't do me much good, for nobody would guess where I was. Even Rick could never think I was a prisoner in the rocks, and Flora, though she might be more ready to suspect, would hardly think of that. And my heart got pretty heavy when I went into that gully.

Of course, the pony couldn't climb down into the gully and across and up the rocks on the other side, so when we got opposite the place where the big hole was, Castle led the little fellow away into the woods, a short distance from the path, and tied him there. And then we all climbed down and through the gully, and got up on the flat rock where I had first seen the men.

There's no use telling how I felt. I was just

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about hopeless, and I was pretty near sure that I'd never get out of that place without something horrible happening to me. But they didn't give me any time to think of things at all, but just hustled me over to the hole. When they got there they whistled a queer kind of whistle, like part of a tune, and then I found out that the third man must be down in the hole now, for an answering whistle came up quite plainly from the bottom.

Castle leaned over and pulled up the rope out of the place where Rick had found it, and Benedict took hold of it and then let himself over the edge of the rocks, hanging on to the rope and finding places to put his feet. And down out of sight he went, lots easier than I supposed he could. Then, in a minute afterwards, Castle pulled the rope clear up, and taking hold of me, he put the end of it around under my arms and tied it, and then he told me to start climbing down the same way Benedict had gone.

That deep, dark hole was a horrible sort of place. I don't believe anybody but a thief or a

criminal trying to hide would ever think of climbing down into it. It was getting so late in the day now that the sun was down behind the trees over the river way, and the darkness in the hole was almost black. You could still see the faint shine of the water at the bottom, but it was harder to know how far down it was. Still I had to try, so I took hold of the rope above where it was tied around me, and started.

"You'll find steps for your feet, if you try," Castle said, holding on to the rope and letting it out slowly as I got down over the edge.

But it felt to me as if there wasn't any bottom under me at all, and as if I was going to fall, sure, all the time. And I had hard work to get down at all, till I found that I could get my feet into standing places as Castle said, by kicking around under me against the stones. And in a minute I discovered that they had cut steps in the rock, so that it wasn't so hard as you might think.

Well, I got down into the hole pretty far before I had any idea what I was going to find there.

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And then I was surprised. I guess it must have been twenty-five feet or maybe more from the top of the rocks down to the water, and it wasn't till I got down as much as sixteen or eighteen feet, which is more than three times as high as my head, that I found I was coming to an open space, because I couldn't find any more place for my feet to step. And then, all at once, I felt somebody take hold of my legs, and next second I was being lowered down into the arms of a man, who was standing on some kind of a bank or platform or something, right at the edge of the water. And then I suddenly found that I had come to a cave or a sort of room that was dug in the earth at one side of the big hole, extending in between and under the rocks on that side, and that Benedict had hold of me, and that the other man of the three—the fat one—was there, too.

Well, as soon as Benedict untied the rope from around me, and let me stand by myself, I looked around pretty quick. The ground I stood on was part sand and part earth, with the rock coming

to the surface in places and looking as if it had been chipped off to make a level floor. The whole room, in fact, seemed to be just cut out of the side of the rock wall, and I found out afterwards that it had been, though most of the cutting had been just digging out the earth. At one side was the water, which I knew, of course, was part of the brook flowing through the cave. On the other three sides were just the walls of the room.

There was a lantern hanging in the room, and by its light I could see the men as they stood looking at me. The light was dim, and it didn't show everything very well, but it showed that they were awfully serious as they stood there and, when, after a minute, Castle came down the rope and was with them, they all just looked at each other, as if they wished I was anywhere in the world but there. I wished so, too, I guess, for when I looked around and saw that room and remembered that it couldn't be seen at all from the top of the rocks, I thought it was just as good a prison as it was a hiding-place.

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Of course I hadn't forgotten the cave that Rick and I had found, or that it had an opening into this hole, and one of the first glances I gave at the water-side of the place was to see if I could find where the opening under the rocks was through which the stream flowed. But I knew right away that I couldn't tell then, for there were two or three overhanging rocks on the opposite side of the hole, and the stream might flow out from under any of them. I did feel a little bit of hope when I remembered that I knew something about the place that I believed the men didn't know, or, at least, something they wouldn't suspect I knew. But I felt so much afraid that my knowledge wouldn't help me that I didn't get much encouragement out of it.

Well, after the men had looked at each other and at me for a minute or two, and Benedict had told the third man, whose name was Vilas, where and how I'd been caught, and who I was, Castle told me to go over and sit down on a box at one side of the cave and keep still while they talked.

"And don't you do anything foolish," he said. "If you make a noise I'll throw you into the water there, and it's as cold as ice, and there's no bottom at all to it."

I stared at him when he said that, and it made him think I didn't believe him.

"Here," he said quick. "Come here," and then he made me kneel down at the edge and put my hand into the water, to feel how cold it was, though I knew already, of course. And then he went to a corner of the cave, and took up a long pole that stood up inside the hole, high over our heads. And he plunged the pole down into the water, and down and down, at least fifteen feet, and he didn't touch bottom. And then he rolled up his shirt sleeves and he pushed the pole down against the smooth side till the water came up to his elbow, and still the pole didn't touch.

"Now," he said, "if you fall in there you will never get out, for nobody could swim in that water two minutes without getting cramps. So don't you think for a second you can risk falling in

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there by trying to climb up the rocks. We're going to keep you here, and you may as well make up your mind not to make a fuss. If you make a fuss I'll cuff your head for you, anyway, and that's all you'll get by it."

Then he got up and set the pole up against the rocks again, and turned away from me, as if he knew he had settled me, all right. And he had, too, for that time, for the way he talked, and the thought of how awfully deep and cold that water was, made me too much afraid to think of trying to do anything but what they told me. And it did something else to me that they didn't know about, too, and that was to take away any prospect that I could get out through the hole into the cave by wading or swimming across to it, after I'd found out just where it was.

Well, I went and sat down on the box again at one side of the cave, and began to look at what the men had in there, while they got together at the other end of the place to talk. There was a lot of things in the cave, and I was surprised.

There was a heavy table in the middle against the wall farthest from the water, and there were several rough boxes, and even one old wooden chair to sit on. Over at one side, too, there was a sort of fireplace, made of stones, and on this there was a fire burning, and I noticed as soon as I saw this that the room wasn't nearly so cold as I had supposed any place in those rocks must be. And there were some queer-looking things on the table that I couldn't understand at first—some tools and things like that.

Of course I remembered about the bag of money I had seen the men lower into the place, and I looked around for that, for I was sure, I thought, that the cave must be for a hiding-place for stolen things. I saw a bag lying under the table, which seemed to have something in it, but I couldn't believe they'd throw money down under there as carelessly as that. I looked around the walls for some kind of an opening that would show where they might stow away this stuff, but I couldn't see any such place as that, either.

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After I had looked around awhile, I began to try to listen to what the men said, but I couldn't hear anything worth while for some time. At last, though, after they had talked for quite awhile, they all came together at the table, drawing up boxes to sit on. But Castle, before sitting down, went to the corner of the room near which the knotted rope hung, and suddenly commenced to pull a big, heavy, rough curtain across the whole opening towards the water. It ran on rings on a wire stretched in a sort of groove under the edge of the rocky roof, and when it was drawn it filled the whole side of the cave or room, tight, so that I was sure no light could ever be seen from the fire or the lantern if anybody should possibly look down into the hole at night.

Then Benedict took down the hanging lantern, turned it up bright, and set it on the table, and then he came over to the table, too, and he took up a pen and some paper he had there.

"Whose pony is that you had to-day?" he asked.

"It belongs to the livery at Little Fern Hotel," I answered.

"What are the initials of this Mr. Lally you say is in your camp?" he asked me then.

I hesitated. He was evidently going to write to him or about him, and for a minute it occurred to me that, if I wouldn't tell him, maybe I could make it harder for him some way to keep me prisoner. But I knew it would be easy for him to get along without the initials if he had to, and so I told him right out.

"G. F. Lally," I said.

I was wondering what he was going to write, but I was surprised again when he suddenly pushed the paper over to me and put the pen in my hand.

"Write to him," he said. "Date your letter from Frayne and write as I tell you."

I looked at him, startled, but he just nodded at me, scowling, meaning for me to begin without any fuss, and so I just had to. And this is what I wrote while he said the words:

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"DEAR MR. LALLY: I found my Aunt Margaret here at Frayne, and she wants me to go back home with her now. I am sending this letter by the man who takes the pony home. Tell the boys good-by for me.

"Yours truly,

"WITTER WHITEHEAD."

When I finished, Benedict took the pen and another piece of paper, and then he did a surprising thing. He laid my aunt's letter on the table before him, and he imitated her writing so cleverly that I don't believe I could have told it wasn't hers. And he wrote this letter:

"MR. G. F. LALLY,

"DEAR SIR: I have decided to take Witter home with me, instead of letting him go back to camp. I'm alone at home now, and we'll be company for each other.

"MARGARET WHITEHEAD."

CHAPTER XI

CAVE DWELLERS

THOSE two letters took almost every bit of hope out of me. They were so natural that I might have written mine and Aunt Margaret hers, and that was just what Mr. Lally would think. Rick would wonder, of course, that I should go away so, without any word to him, but he would think my aunt probably made me go, and that I would write to him later. Then, he wouldn't think it very wonderful if I didn't send him a letter for a week, at least, though he might think it was mean, after our adventure together and the plans we had made.

Rick would know, of course, that I wouldn't give up finding out about the robbers' cave, and

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he would believe that I would keep on writing to Captain Benson, and perhaps might come up to the Little Fern again, if the officers came. And I guessed he knew me well enough to know that I wouldn't leave him out if anything interesting happened. But the only thing that would happen, when, day after day had gone by and he had not heard from me, would be that he would be mad at me.

As for Flora, she wouldn't expect to hear from me for a while, and she would only think that I was pretty careless if I didn't write to her within a week or two. And neither Mr. Lally nor Aunt Margaret would suspect anything was wrong at all.

I was heavy-hearted enough as I sat there, after the letters were done, but I listened to what was said.

"Now," said Benedict, folding up each letter, "you address yours and I'll address Aunt Margaret's." And so we did that. How I wished I could put some mark on the envelope to show that

everything was not just as it seemed; but, of course, I couldn't.

"Castle, I guess you'd better take that pony back to Little Fern, and deliver these letters," Benedict said. "It's quite a ways to go to-night, but we can't be too prompt."

"All right," said Castle. "Will you come here in the morning?"

"Yes. Vilas will have to stay all night to see to things and keep track of this kid. We'd better pull the rope up when we leave so that there'll be no chance for the little fool to climb out."

He looked at me when he said that, and I knew I couldn't possibly get away if they did as they said.

"Do you want to work any to-night?" asked Vilas.

"No," Benedict answered. "I was tired enough when we started out before, and now we've lost another hour or more over this boy."

He scowled at me, and they all scowled, though,

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as I happened to look at the fat man, it seemed to me he didn't really feel so bad about my being there as the others did.

"Besides," said Benedict, "I want to get rid of the balance of that first batch if we can."

He looked over the things on the table with a sort of disgusted expression, but in a minute afterwards he got up quickly.

"Come on, Castle," he said. "We'll start."

So Castle took the letters and they both went to the knotted rope, and one after the other they climbed up, each just nodding good-night to Vilas. After they had got out of sight above us, I saw the rope being pulled up, too, and I wondered if that didn't make Vilas a prisoner as well as me. When I turned to look at him he was grinning at me.

"You don't like this much?" he asked.

"Of course not," I said. "Do you like to stay here all night?"

"I'll like it better now you're here, if you won't act the baby."

I stared at him. His voice sounded pretty good-natured, and his fat face was smiling broader than ever.

"I haven't been a baby yet, have I?" I asked.

"No," he said, and his face sobered a little. "So you're the kid that got Morse caught, are you?" he asked in a moment.

"I found the house where he lived, accidentally," I answered.

"And told the police?"

"Yes."

"I s'pose Morse has got it in for you just as he has for Benedict," Vilas said.

"I don't know," I answered. "Maybe he hasn't got it in for Benedict."

"You bet he has. If he ever gets his hands on him he'll leave a mark on the old man."

"Did he really catch Benedict in his rooms in the city?"

"Oh, you read about that, did you? No—he hasn't seen Benedict, and won't see him. It's half for fear of Morse that Benedict's up here."

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"What's the other half?" I asked.

Vilas stopped talking suddenly. Then he laughed. "I guess you'll know, if you stay here," he answered. "And I guess you're going to stay."

"How long?" I asked, for he talked so easy he encouraged me.

"I don't know," he replied. "Till you're gray-headed, for all I know."

"My friends will find me," I said, sort of boldly.

"Think so?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

"Well," he answered. "They might, but the moon might fall, too."

"You mean there isn't any chance?"

"There's about as much chance of your friends finding you here as there is of your finding the end of the equator by walking around the earth."

I sat and looked at him, hopeless, for I knew it seemed about so. In my heart I knew I was just thinking that there was a chance Rick might start

something to help me. But that didn't seem likely, and nothing else seemed even possible. How I wished then that I had come right out and told somebody all about this place. How I wished I had told Mr. Lally, or—yes, that negro, who I believed to be a detective. If he knew it, there wouldn't be much time lost in waiting.

Then I remembered my letter and Flora's to Captain Benson, and I thought, maybe, when Captain Benson learned all I had to tell, he would perhaps come up from the city to see me, and then I would be missed, and then they would hunt for me, and somebody would suspect where I was. But suppose Captain Benson should only write again, instead of coming. A letter to the camp at Little Fern would be forwarded to Aunt Margaret's, and she would simply think that meant I was coming soon, and she might keep the letter a week or two before she would think it very strange I hadn't come. I couldn't really see a single way for any hope.

But the fat man, Vilas, was laughing again, as he looked at me, and pretty soon he spoke.

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"Are you hungry?" he asked.

I didn't think I was, very, but I knew it was long past supper-time then, and when I thought about it, I knew that I'd feel a little better probably if I could get something to eat, so I said yes.

He got up from the box he was sitting on right away.

"So am I," he said, and he went to a box at the other end of the room and opened it.

"Will you have beefsteak or tea?" he asked me over his shoulder.

I laughed at that. It sounded so funny, even there in that place, and I was just getting to feel quiet enough so that I felt sort of weak inside, and could laugh or cry either, pretty easy. And because he wanted to joke, it made me feel more encouraged and hopeful in a second.

I didn't answer, for I didn't believe he meant it at all. And then, in a minute, he took some things out of the box and came over to the table. He looked down at me again with his face all full

of fun, and then he stood on one foot and put one hand on his hip, with the other holding a board like a tray on his fingers, with the things to eat on it.

“R-r-roast beef, stewed beef, beef extract, ham and, chicken giblets or hash? Huckleberry, blueberry, or mud pie? What’s the order, sir?”

I laughed again, but didn’t answer. He set down his board just as if I’d ordered.

“Ham and, eh?” he said, and he put a little wooden dish before me with cold Frankfurts in it. “And huckleberry pie,” he added, putting out a big piece of cheese. And then he set some bread beside that and called it a “paté de foie gras.” And in a minute he went to a place at the edge of the water, at the other end from the rope, and came back with a paper bucket with butter in it.

He laughed, too, as he pulled up a box and sat down. “Let’s eat,” he said. “This provender isn’t the best ever, but we’ll have better to-morrow or we’ll both go on a strike. We’ve only just

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moved in here, you know. This is a sort of house-warming you've come to."

The way he talked made me feel like making the best of it, for it seemed to me that anybody who was so full of fun couldn't be very mean, or wouldn't do anything very bad to a boy. And then, just seeing those things to eat, which looked clean and good, even if it was a funny combination, made me hungry. In a minute, then, I did commence to eat, and I ate and ate.

Vilas went on talking while we had supper, and he ate a great deal more than I did. But he told me some interesting things.

"No," he said, suddenly going back to a question I'd asked him earlier—"No, Morse hasn't caught Benedict yet. Benedict just made a wreck of his rooms in the city to fool the police, because we'd found this place up here where we could work this new game. I guess he'd have come, anyway, if there wasn't any game to work, because he doesn't sleep easy of nights so long as Morse is loose."

"Is Morse around here anywhere?" I asked.

Vilas stopped eating suddenly. "Heavens, no! I hope not!"

"Are you afraid of him?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, right out. "So is anybody else that knows him."

"What'll he do to Benedict?"

"Well, he prob'ly won't find him, for this is a hard place to find."

"Did you know him in the city?" I asked.

"Don't ask me any questions like that, young man," he said, grinning. "I know him, that's enough."

"Won't he keep after Benedict till he gets him, then?" I asked.

"Yes, or till the officers get Morse—as they will after a while."

"But won't his friends help him?"

"Whose friends?"

"Morse's."

"Morse's friends? Bless you, he hasn't got any. There's nobody that all the gang hates and is as afraid of as that fellow."

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He meant what he said, for he looked solemn, in spite of the fact that his face was all shiny in the lantern light, and he kept on eating cheese and "weenies," as he called the Frankfurts.

Well, then he went on to tell me some more things about what had happened in the days before this time, and he told me quite a lot that showed he had known all these men quite a while, and that they had all done things they might be sent to prison for. But he was so cool about it and made so many jokes and seemed so comfortable after his supper and all, that it seemed as if he couldn't really have had any part in the things he told about. It was just like listening to anybody tell stories.

I almost forgot that I had to stay there in that place all that night, and nobody could know how much longer, and that I was really in as much danger as I could be very well. And finally I found myself getting sleepy, just as if I was at home in camp listening to Mr. Lally's stories.

"Guess you better turn in," Vilas said, when he

saw my eyes nearly close; and he got up and pulled some blankets and things out of a corner and fixed two, all folded up, for me to lie down on, with a part of one to put over me. And I thought I could sleep, too, for I was tired, I can tell you.

So we got a drink of water from the spring Vilas showed me right at the edge of the pool, which he told me was only one of those that had made it; and then he fixed his bed the same as mine. When I lay down he put out the lantern and then pulled the curtain one side a little so that we'd have some fresh air. And then, in a minute, I thought it was, I heard him snoring on his blankets.

After I lay down, though, for some reason I wasn't sleepy any more at all. It seemed to me that I was never more wide awake. I lay looking up into the darkness to the place where I knew the opening in the curtain was, and trying to see whether I could really tell any difference between the faint light from the low fire, which was only coals now, and the outside darkness.

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Vilas snored and snored, and the fire just burned lower and lower, brightening once in a while a little and showing everything in the cave with a sort of yellow light, and then sinking down till I could hardly see anything at all. And all the time I gradually got more and more excited, and farther and farther away from sleeping, because I was realizing what a place I was in and what terrible danger it was. And I knew it was just because I had been foolish that I had got there at all, and I think I honestly felt worse over that than over the rest.

But it seemed to me that I had to find out what these men were doing here, if I could, and then try to find a way to get out of the hole, if possible, and I thought and thought about that so fast and hard that I was just like you are when you have a fever. You see things so vividly, and you get so stirred up about what you are imagining. And, at the last, I just knew I couldn't lie still there any longer.

I sat up. Vilas was still snoring away, not very

loud, but enough so it was easy to know he was asleep. I got up on my feet, just feeling that I must do something then. And when Vilas still slept on, I walked softly over to the table, got a match from a little box I had seen there while we were eating; and then I struck it carefully and looked all around at the things there. They didn't look like much to me, but I knew that I ought to be able to tell from these tools what these men were doing, or what the game was, as Vilas called it.

Of course the match went out in a minute, and I had to strike another, but I could hear Vilas breathing all the time, and I wasn't afraid. And so I made another light. On the table near the back I had seen a sort of box-like thing with an iron handle that I had been curious about earlier, and it was that I wanted most to look at. So, when the second match flared up, I reached over and took hold of the iron handle, and a kind of lid came up easily. I stood looking sort of stupidly inside for a minute, at two plates like print-

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ers' cuts, which lay there side by side. And then, all at once, I understood what they were, for it was as plain as could be. Each was part of an engraved plate of a two-dollar bill, and as I looked, the word that described what this gang was doing and why they were hiding, jumped into my mind in a flash.

"Counterfeiters!"

I stood still and stared and stared, and forgot the match till it burned my fingers, and I had to let it drop. And then I struck another. But, as I struck the third one, I suddenly thought to listen for Vilas' snoring, and I couldn't hear it. I turned, in a fright, to look at him, holding the match high and stooping over to see him, and there he lay, with his eyes wide open, looking at me as quietly as he had looked at supper.

CHAPTER XII

A NIGHT AWAKE

I STOOD perfectly still. I don't believe I had been so very much afraid to do what I had been doing, before I turned and saw Vilas' eyes open. But when I saw them looking at me so quietly, just as if he hadn't been asleep at all, and had known from the first that I was up and moving around, I just felt about as you might if you thought you were seeing a ghost.

But the strangest part of it was that, after I turned and was looking back at him, he never moved. The light of the match showed on his face, which seemed to be just wet with perspiration, and it made little bright points of glitter in his eyes, too, just as if they were glass, and I

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could see them change as the flame of the match flared up and then burned lower. But he lay perfectly still. I couldn't even see him breathe.

It was ever so much worse, after just the first second, to have him lie still and stare at me that way, than if he had sat up quick and acted mad. I couldn't dream what he was thinking or what he would do, and everything was so horribly still, and I felt so sort of weak for fear of what he might try to do to me that I was just about ready to sink down on the ground.

The match I was holding burned slowly, and I just stood holding it till the flame grew small and then suddenly went out. And all the time the man never changed at all. But just as the flame made its last little flicker, my heart jumped because I thought I saw all at once that his eyes were closing again. I couldn't tell sure, for it was too dark to see, after my light was out, and I didn't know but maybe just the sinking of the match-flame had made it seem to happen.

I didn't dare to move, but stood where I was,

holding my breath and waiting. I expected to see Vilas stir and begin to get up, or to hear him speak out to me, any second. The only light in the cave now came from the fire, which was almost dead, and his big, fat figure, half covered by the blanket, looked like a black shadow. I hung on to the edge of the table, against which I was standing, and looked for the first move. Two or three times I thought I saw him beginning to draw up his feet, which were towards the fire. Then I thought I saw him commencing to push the blanket away from his face and turning ready to make some move. And then, all at once, in the darkness, I heard him begin to snore again.

I couldn't hardly believe it, for I had been so sure he was awake and watching me that I couldn't understand how it was possible. I thought he must be playing me a trick, though why he should do that I couldn't see, either. But his breathing was as even as if he hadn't been disturbed at all, and grew slowly heavier and heavier, till I began to believe maybe he hadn't waked up

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at all when he had been looking at me. I had never seen anybody open his eyes in his sleep then, but I have since. Rick does it sometimes, and I've seen other people do it. And they don't really see you at all, I've found out, though they seem to be looking at you. They are half awake, perhaps, but not quite, and so they don't know what you are doing, and don't remember afterwards. But I couldn't think how it could be so, then, and so I expected, as much as could be, to have him stop snoring pretty quick and show me that he hadn't been asleep at all.

But he kept on and on and on, not changing, and so natural that I couldn't believe he was shamming; and after I had stood still till my wrists began to get stiff from resting my hands on the table, I sort of became sure at last that he hadn't been disturbed at all.

A little ashes fell in the fire, while I was thinking these things, and the light in the cave got so dim that I really couldn't tell that Vilas was there at all if he hadn't kept on breathing so hard. And

when I heard the little sounds that the coals made in sinking down, it seemed to just make me feel that I was safe. But the way I had been scared by that surprise made me sure that I didn't want to try any more looking around then. So, when I made up my mind I could move safely, I just crept across the floor to my blankets and lay down on them again quick, and pulled the cover over me.

Well, it didn't make me any more ready to sleep then than I had been before, to have found out the things I had learned. I'd heard about counterfeiters, and I knew that they were supposed to be just as bad as burglars, or maybe worse. I knew that men who made imitations of money, or who tried to pass it for good money, could be sent to prison, and that sometimes the very worst kind of men were the ones who did it. The officers of the government secret service were always looking for them, and they were always ready to do about anything to cover up where they were. And when I thought of all the things I'd

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heard about such men, I didn't feel any happier to know that Benedict was one of them, and that I was in their cave.

I lay there in the darkness thinking about it and getting so hot all over that I couldn't bear the blanket over me, and so frightened and miserable that there wasn't any chance for me to go to sleep. And I tried and tried to think of some plan for getting away, though I don't believe that what I thought then was very good sense, for when I remembered it afterwards, I wondered how it had seemed possible that I could do any of the things I had thought of.

But while I lay there, looking up at the roof of the cage, which I couldn't see now on account of the dark, suddenly I heard a sharp little splash in the water of the pool, out beyond the curtain, as if a single stone had dropped from above somewhere and struck the water.

It wasn't a big splash, but it was one you couldn't make any mistake about, and it was so near that it seemed to be almost beside my head.

Of course, I was holding my breath in a second, and thinking of ever so many things at once. You wouldn't think, maybe, that just the dropping of one stone into the pool would be anything to think about particularly, but the second I heard it, somehow I remembered that all the sides of the pool were of big solid rocks, and that no small stones could drop in very easily, unless they were pushed over the edge above or something like that. I mean that there weren't any stones around on the inside of the hole, just stuck into dirt so that they might gradually get loose and fall, just by themselves, at night.

The sound was the only thing I heard for a minute, and then came a gentle little lapping of the water on the rock just outside, and I knew that was the ripples the splash had made. But they had only just started making a sound I could hear, when another splash came, this time quite a little larger and louder, and so close that I heard the drops from it hit against the curtain right beside me.

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Well, I didn't know what to think about that. Of course, almost anything really could have made the stones fall. An animal might be climbing around up above over our heads, digging or hunting for food, though it wouldn't seem as if any animal would knock just one stone over the edge, twice, like that. Someway, even at the first, I thought right away of the time when I first looked down into the hole, and threw a stone over the edge to see if I could tell how deep the place was. And the idea of somebody else up there doing the same thing got into my head and made me more excited than before.

After the second splash, though, while the ripples were slapping against the stones again, I suddenly heard another sound that startled me more, and that was the distinct snapping of leaves as something forced its way through the brush right at the edge of the big hole.

Then some funny thoughts come to me. First I had the idea that I ought to wake Vilas up to listen, too. That I thought of, just as I would

have thought of waking up Mr. Lally if I heard anyone prowling around our camp at Little Fern. Then I remembered, all at once, that if anybody was out there hunting around, if they weren't friends of Vilas and his gang, I didn't have to care, because any enemies at all of the counterfeiters must be friends of mine. And from that I jumped all at once to the notion that maybe it was some friends of mine who had got anxious and had found out from Rick about this place, and had come right here to look around. Of course, they might think I had come here to look again at the cave and that I had fallen into the pool. Still, if Rick had told them all about the place, I was sure they wouldn't come around, sneaking through the bushes and dropping stones down in, in the dead of night, without lights.

Well, the noise was so plain, and I kept hearing it so steady every little while, somebody or something brushing around in the bushes and leaves, that I couldn't stand it to lie still at last. So I sat up again. I looked over to where Vilas

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was lying, but I couldn't see a thing now, because it was pitch-black in the cave. I couldn't hear him breathe now, but everything was perfectly still in the room, so I thought he couldn't be moving.

I waited a minute or two, and then, as the bushes still scraped and rustled, I crept on my hands and knees across the floor and over to the place where the curtain was open. I was mighty careful, you can believe, for I didn't want to crawl out through the opening in the curtain and fall into that icy water outside. I reached around in the dark, trying to get hold of the curtain, and then felt along over to the sandy floor, searching for the edge of it. And I got a little confused, too, before I found where both were, because I crawled so slowly it seemed to take me an awfully long while to get anywhere, and I seemed to be lost or going in a wrong direction, and I got that horrible feeling you get in the dark sometimes of not being very sure that you really know just where you are, or that you remember how things are shaped around you.

But I touched the curtain after a few seconds, and then easily felt along that to the open place; and then, with my hands on the rock edge, I bent down and turned my head to look up as high as I could toward the top of the hole. I couldn't see anything, though, for it was just as dark outside. I couldn't even see any light on the water or the rocks across the pool. But I could hear, plainer than ever, the movements up above, for the walls of the hole seemed to bring the sounds down to me just the way you can hear sounds down an elevator shaft, when you are standing waiting for a car to take you up.

But I hadn't much more than got there, and was bending to listen, when I felt the curtain move against me, and the next second something touched me from behind, and then all at once I was grabbed back away from the edge, and a big, fat hand, that was all covered with sand, too, clapped over my mouth, and Vilas was holding me and whispering in my ear.

"If you make a sound I'll choke you!" he said,

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and I felt his breath hot in my hair and on my neck. "You lie down here on your blankets and keep still. I'll find out what's doing up above."

Well, he'd heard the noise, too, of course, and after holding me a while, he took his hand off my mouth and pushed me towards my blankets. I didn't dare do anything but what he told me, either, so I just crawled to my bed and rolled over on it and waited, rubbing the sand off my mouth. I didn't know what he was meaning to do, and I was about as interested as anybody could be, but I had to wait and be still.

I couldn't tell what was happening, and I waited in the stillness, and tried to see when I knew it wasn't possible to see. And then all at once I heard a sound that I did understand. It was a faint scrape of the rings of the curtain on the wire that supported it. Vilas was opening the curtain, I thought. Then it was all still again.

But the noise up above had stopped now, and the stillness was so perfect that I could hear my clothes move when I breathed. I tried not to

breathe two or three times, as long as I could stand it, so as to listen and know what Vilas was doing. But he didn't seem to be stirring at all, and there I sat waiting and waiting so long that I was sure it must be getting along towards morning.

And then all at once there was a sudden furious scuffling and scrambling among the bushes outside, and stones and dirt and leaves and twigs all commenced to come down at once together into the water, and suddenly a wild screaming, or rather a regular squealing kind of noise, just seemed to fill the whole hole full, and down came a big, heavy body, with a roaring splash, in the middle of the pool.

The water went all over everything in our cave—all over me and all over the blankets, and all around in big drops, as if a wave had broken on us, and it struck in my face and on my hands, cold as could be. And I was so scared that I guess I hollered right out, for it seemed afterwards that I must have. I sort of remembered it.

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For a second it was still again, after the fall of the big thing, except for the slop of the water. Then suddenly there was a splashing out in the middle, a snort, and then a quick, hurried kind of beating of water, and I could hear hard, quick, panting breathing, sounding just as it would inside a barrel or something like that. And I knew that whatever or whoever had fallen into the big hole was alive, at least.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DOG THAT DISAPPEARED

I GUESS I thought all my waiting and keeping still was at an end when that big splash came. I rolled over the blankets to get away from the water, and also to get away from the edge of the pool, for I was afraid that, next thing I knew, somebody would be climbing up into the cave and right on to me.

I heard Vilas, too, jumping back from the edge and then running across the room quick, and I heard him go bang into the table against the back wall. But next second he was whispering to himself, and that made me keep still again and wait, for I could hear him plainly.

"It's a dog!" he whispered, sort of breathless.

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“Where’s—where’s that gun!” And he went fumbling over towards the corner near the head of his own bed, exclaiming to himself and hurrying, yet really pretty quiet, too.

And all the while the panting and splashing sounded in the pool, and when I stopped to listen to it once more I was sure he was right, too—it was a dog. As soon as I thought that, then I remembered the squealing I’d heard when he fell, and I was certain that it had been a dog’s frightened yelp, though I hadn’t known it for that when I first heard it, hollow and echoing in the rocks. And I drew a long breath of relief, too, for even if I was in a bad place and afraid of the men who had me there, I was more afraid to think there might be a man out there in the dark whom I knew nothing about, and who was going to attack us.

But the dog was swimming around in the pool, and he blew the water out of his nose again in a minute, with the same kind of snort I’d heard the first time, and, in just a minute, he commenced to

whine and moan, as if he was scared or hurt or something, as probably the poor fellow was. And then all of a sudden he stopped moaning and splashing at the same time, and was still for a second, and then he seemed to be turning or twisting or rising up in the water, or something like that, different from swimming, for the sound made me think of that. And all at once he stopped moving altogether in the water and was still.

Well, I couldn't understand that, for I was sure he hadn't come over to our side of the pool, and that he couldn't be out on any other rocks around the inside, for I didn't believe there was one that would hold him. Besides, a dog that climbs out of the water almost always shakes himself the very first thing, and I hadn't heard any such noise as that. But in a second I heard Vilas again.

"By George! He's sunk!" he said half out loud. "The cold's got the best of him!" And then I heard the man go forward across the cave to the edge and stop there, and then we both listened and listened, and we couldn't hear a thing

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but the sound of the little waves again and the drip of the water from the splashed rocks. And I thought that what Vilas said was true, and that, sudden as it was, the dog must have sunk.

It made me shudder, too, I can tell you, for I had thought that night, while I was lying awake alone so long, that maybe it might be possible for me to bear the cold of the water long enough on my body to swim across the pool to the opening into the cave Rick and I had found, and to get away that way. But I knew in an instant that if a dog couldn't stand it, a boy surely couldn't. But Vilas spoke again pretty soon, and this time it was to me, and in a low tone.

"Where are you, kid?" he asked.

"Here," I whispered.

"What are you doing?"

"Keeping still."

He was quiet a second, and then he turned back into the cave, and in a minute he came over beside me.

"That was a dog," he said, as if he thought I couldn't tell.

"Yes," I said.

"And he's drowned," he added.

"Is he?" I asked. "How do you know?"

"The pool is ice-cold," he said. "Castle made you put your hand into it, you know."

"Yes," I said. "I know."

"And it hasn't any bottom. Benedict says that it has a subterranean outlet somewhere, deep down, and that's the way Mr. Dog has gone. That's the way anybody'll go that falls down in there."

I thought probably that was true. But it made me think of the opening into the cave over opposite us, and all at once I wondered if possibly the dog might not have just chanced to find that place, and if, perhaps, he hadn't climbed up into the cave, and if he wasn't in there now—or maybe on his way out, if he could find his way out. But I didn't say anything about that, you may be pretty sure.

Vilas was quiet for several minutes after we stopped hearing the dog, and I didn't know

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whether he was listening or what he was doing, so I waited and was still, too. After a while, though, Vilas whispered to me again.

"It's very queer," he said. "I don't see how that could have happened. I don't believe dogs run around alone much in the woods at night. If he was with a man, though, it wouldn't be likely he'd fall in here."

I didn't know, so I didn't answer.

"I haven't heard anything more since he sank, though," he went on. "If anybody was up there in the bushes he's gone away, I guess."

"Couldn't we hear him go away, if anybody had been there with the dog?" I asked.

"Yes, probably," he answered. "I wish Benedict had left the rope down. I ought to go up and look around. Now we'll have to wait till morning."

"Isn't it morning now?"

"Well, it's pretty early."

He stopped for a minute, and we both stood there thinking; then he went on.

"If there'd been anybody with that dog who knew about the hole here, he never would have let the dog fall in. If he didn't know about the hole, he would have come to look for his dog, and we would have heard him. I don't believe anybody was there. The dog was probably chasing some little animal around and got too near the edge. He drowned quick, didn't he?"

"Yes," I said, shivering again, and thinking what a horrible thing it would have been if I had tried to swim the pool.

"Well," said Vilas, "we better turn in again now and get some sleep."

He moved away from me, and I heard him go over to the corner again, and then I understood that he had had the gun and was putting it away again. In a minute he was over at his blankets again and lying down.

"Are you getting back to bed there, youngster?" he whispered across to me. And I started quick and whispered back that I was.

He hadn't drawn the curtain, and the air was

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pretty cool now, but it had been warm in the cave and the blanket was enough over me. I lay down and began to think again. I was not sleepy at all, but felt as if I wanted to yawn all the time, and my body felt so sort of tired all through each muscle as I lay there that I just stretched and stretched and turned over and then back again.

I was pretty confident now that Vilas hadn't seen me when I had thought he was looking at me in his sleep in the early part of the night. I was pretty sure he would have said something about it if he had, though I'd forgotten it, too, while we were so startled about the dog. I was mighty glad if he hadn't.

But I didn't feel the same way about the dog and the rustling we had heard in the bushes, and I wasn't satisfied with the way he had thought it out. It might be so that a man prowling around up there wouldn't let his dog fall in, or would try to get him out when he did fall in, and all that. But dogs don't throw stones down into holes. Of course, Vilas probably hadn't heard

the stones fall, as I had, and so he couldn't figure on them. But it seemed to me he was pretty easily satisfied.

I lay and thought and thought about it. Vilas was snoring again pretty soon; but I couldn't even shut my eyes, except to wink, and oh, I felt awfully lonesome and bad, I tell you! And I kept going over and over all the things that had happened, and thinking them out and thinking them out, worrying about what Rick and Flora and Mr. Lally and Captain Benson would do, and, really, I found out that I was actually disappointed because the disturbance we had had was made by just a poor dog that had probably been drowned.

It isn't any use to write out all the things I thought about, or how miserable I felt, but I didn't go to sleep at all. I just lay there and heard the wind blow softly in the bushes up at the top of the hole, and felt thrills go through me every time there was a sound. And I saw the daylight when it began to grow gray in the big hole, with the surface of the pool turning slowly

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light first and then the black rocks themselves, looking as if some kind of filmy veil was on them and was being slowly drawn in out of sight, right through them, till they came out clear and cold and dry.

I looked over the pool carefully while I lay there, but couldn't see any more than I had the night before. And I was getting so shivery and sort of sick at my stomach from lying awake all night that I was glad, I tell you, when Vilas suddenly stopped breathing hard and sat up. And then I had a queer feeling come over me, for I began to feel that I hadn't really realized that I was in such a very strange place, or in such a dangerous trouble till then. I felt as if I had been believing all the time that I was having only a bad dream, from which I would wake up soon. And now I seemed to have waked up to find it all come true. I can tell you I thought about my father and mother away off in England, and about how they'd feel if they knew all the trouble I was in, and I was pretty near cying about it, when

Vilas got up and came over to look down at me. Then I couldn't cry, of course, for I wouldn't let him see me be a baby.

Well, Vilas started a fire and I got up. Of course we had laid down in our clothes all night, and so I was all dressed. But I felt sort of uncomfortable in them—kind of prickly all over and disagreeable. I'd never had my clothes on all night like that before, except the one time when I slept under the bed in the house of the silver thieves. And I'd never laid awake all through a night before at all. But when Vilas made some coffee and gave me a cup with some good bread and butter, I commenced to feel better pretty quick, and I ate and drank and almost felt rested for a while.

We talked, of course, but it was mostly about the strange fall of the dog into the pool and all that, and we looked all around at the rocks and up as high as we could see, to try to discover some sign that would tell us something. We couldn't see the top of the hole from the cave, though, so we couldn't hope to find out very much.

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It seemed a long time before Castle and Benedict came. Vilas told me they would be there early, and I guess it was only about half-past seven or something like that when they did come. But we heard the whistle they used as a signal at last, and Vilas answered; and then, after a minute, the rope came down quick, whipping around like a snake, and then first Castle and then Benedict climbed down and in.

But they seemed to be very much worried about something, right at the start, and to be pretty ugly, too, though they didn't pay any attention to me, hardly, so that I knew it wasn't all about me. But they talked together in low tones, and I heard quite a little of what they said, though I kept away from them.

Vilas told them about the dog falling into the pool in the night, and they were a good deal interested, of course; but I knew all about that, and so didn't care so much what they said. But pretty soon I heard Benedict say something that made me listen close.

"Somebody's got wise to one of our bills," were the words I caught, and afterwards I heard enough to make out that he was all stirred up and scared because one of the counterfeits they had made had been refused over at Frayne and had made some talk.

"It's pretty queer," was one of the things he said. "I don't understand it. One of us must have paid out one of those two-dollar bills without knowing it, and somebody was smooth enough to spot it."

"They can't trace it, of course," Castle said, "but somehow a rumor has got around that there's more of the bills in circulation around here, and everybody seems afraid to touch a two-spot."

"Do you think we'll have to quit the game, then?" Vilas asked them.

"No—quit nothing!" Benedict answered, angry. "But it means that Castle or I will have to go down to the city to float the stuff. We'll have to lie low up here."

"Well, it might be worse, then," Vilas answered, as if he didn't care much.

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"Yes," Castle answered; "but it means that we've got to be more careful than we think. We're skating where it's awful thin right now."

Of course I was interested in this. They were having troubles over their bad money already, and that made me wonder how they could keep doing things that weren't honest, like that, because it made just such trouble for them every time.

But, as I sat there listening and thinking, all at once something came into my mind that hadn't occurred to me at all before, and I was suddenly just full of wonder about it. On the morning before, when I was riding to Frayne, and when I stopped at the little country store to water the pony, the negro who I thought was a detective had come up to me and asked me to change a bill. That bill had been a two-dollar note, and the minute I remembered that, I remembered how the farmers had laughed at me after I had changed it, and how I had wondered why.

In a second my thought put together a whole lot of things that might be true. Perhaps that

was a counterfeit the negro had given me. If it was, then he had tried to pass it on the farmers and they had refused it. Where did he get it? He might have picked it up, anyway, but he might have got it direct from Castle or Benedict or Vilas, and he might be close on their trail instead of after Morse. But why had he passed it on me, if he knew or even suspected that it wasn't good?

And then, suddenly, I thought I must still have the bill in my pocket, and I pulled out my purse, while the men were still busy talking, and I looked in it to see. And I suddenly felt very strange, I can tell you, when I saw the money I had left. For there wasn't any two-dollar bill there. It was gone.

CHAPTER XIV

A MESSAGE BY WATER

I ALMOST forgot the men who were at the other end of the cave from me, as I looked for that two-dollar bill in my purse, and then, as I tried to think what I had done with it afterwards, I remembered just how I had taken it from the negro, giving him the silver halves and quarters for it, and how I had put it into my purse before I turned to ride away. But after that I couldn't remember anything more about it, and I began to think that maybe I had lost it. Still, that couldn't hardly be, I thought, or I would have noticed before that it was gone, when I had taken my purse out to pay for the boat Flora and I had had at Frayne, or for the candy I bought.

But all at once it just seemed to come to me how and when I had had that bill out of my pocket. I remembered that I had paid the man at the sanitarium barn for taking care of the pony, and I remembered how I had handed the bill over to him and had received the change back. And when I thought of it I couldn't believe that the liveryman had suspected for a second that anything was the matter with the bill, or he would have showed it so that even I couldn't help knowing it. People always make a fuss if they think anything is wrong about the money you give them. So I was doubtful about that bill again, right away. I knew I didn't have any reason to believe that it had been a counterfeit, except just the foolish notion that that might have been why the men laughed at me at the country store.

I put my purse back in my pocket again and sat and thought about it. But before I'd thought very long, Benedict and Castle and Vilas stopped their conversation, and began to move around and talk more easily. Benedict looked at me two

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or three times, and so did Castle, but Benedict only scowled, while Castle didn't even do that much.

They commenced to talk about the dog again, and pretty soon Castle said he was going to have a look for tracks up in the bushes. So he climbed out of the hole right away, and then Vilas went up, too, as he said, to get a breath of air. And then we heard them tramping around up above very soon, making a good deal more noise than the dog did in the night. But they came back again after a while and said they couldn't discover anything. Vilas told again what he had told me he thought about it, and they seemed to think he was probably right. Castle took the pole with which he had sounded the pool, though, and poked all around the edges of the water, under the overhanging rocks, because, he said, maybe the dogs' body might be floating.

Benedict seemed to think it was queer the dog had drowned so quickly, but they believed the water was cold enough to give any kind of a crea-

ture the camps in a very few seconds, and so they finally concluded the poor dog had gone down and been carried through the subterranean passage. Subterranean, you know, is the word meaning under the earth, and it means a tunnel or underground passage. But I thought again a lot about the cave, too, and wondered and wondered where the opening was through which Rick and I had seen into the pool. And while I was thinking about that, I began to wonder if maybe, after all, we hadn't been mistaken in thinking the cave opened into the big hole at all, for it was just possible there might be another hole up in those rocks, and the cave might lead in there. But I remembered how Rick's hat had sailed out of this hole, and had come down the stream to the place where we found it, and so I was sure again that I must have been right.

Well, it wasn't very long after Castle and Vilas had come back from looking for tracks that I could see the whole three were planning to go out of the cave. Benedict had been busy putting the

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gun and the cartridges and things into the big box and locking it all up all the time the others had been up above, but when they came back he began to talk again to Castle about going down to the city to get rid of some of the bills there. Vilas came over to talk to me then, too, and so I didn't hear what the other two said about their plans except that much.

But Vilas told me that he was going to be away that day, all day, and that Benedict was going to Frayne to look around, and that I'd be all alone all day. He said he was sorry for me, and I really guess maybe he was, though he never did anything for me, except to say so, and to make a little fun to cheer me up. But he told me he wanted to warn me against trying to get away while they were gone, because there wasn't any chance at all. They would pull up the rope, and it would be impossible to climb the rocks without it. And if I should try and should fall into the pool with no one there to help me, then I couldn't hope to get out, any more than the dog could.

It made me sick all over to think of staying there alone all day, and I would almost rather the men would all have stayed than that. If just Vilas had stayed, I would have known he would do something to make the time pass, anyway, but I didn't know what I would do alone. Still, I knew that if they did all go for all day, I certainly wouldn't pay any attention to what Vilas had said about not trying to get away. I would try to plan out a scheme anyway, and I would know all about that big hole that it was possible to find out. So that made me feel a little less bad, even though I hadn't really much hope that I could get away, and was as afraid of that pool as could be after all that had happened.

It was some time after that, still, before the men went away. They talked a lot more about that dog, and how queer it was that he had fallen into the water, and they wondered again about his sudden disappearance. But they didn't come to anything better than they had in the first place, except that they made me think maybe my ideas

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were just as good as theirs were, and maybe it might be after all that the dog had found his way out through the cave. When they climbed out of the place at last, though, I felt as if it was going to be a terrible day for me, and I was just sort of desperate with the idea that unless I could find some way to escape I might have to stay there for days and days and maybe weeks. And I began to be just crazy to get away then.

Well, as soon as the men had gone, and had pulled the rope up, I began to look around. First, I looked at the tools on the table again, and took a long look at the plates in the wooden box. I found that the plates were very much like a bill, and I thought probably the money they had made must be very much like real money. Then I thought about the bag of money I had seen them lower into the hole the first time I had seen them at all, and I knew now that it must have been counterfeit money, all right. Then I got down and looked at the bag I had seen under the table, and I found the packages of bills there, just as I had seen them put into the bag.

There were a good many of them. I don't know how many there were, but I found a loose package among the others, and I was more interested in getting one out and looking at it than in counting them. The light in the cave was not good at all, except when the lantern was lighted. The men had another lamp down there which they evidently used to work by, but they hadn't lighted that since I'd been there. But I lighted the lantern and put it on the table, so as to get a chance to look at the bill.

I studied over that a long time. I wouldn't have known that it wasn't good money, I'm sure, and a good many people have told me since that it was a very good counterfeit, and I wondered and wondered how they were able to do so well. Then I put the money all back in the bag, just as I'd found it, and put the tools away, and began to study on what I was going to try to do.

The first thing I did then was to take down the long pole which Castle had used to sound the pool with and try some sounding myself. It was pretty

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heavy and hard to handle, for there wasn't much room, but I got it down into the water and began to poke around with it at the sides. Over at the left of the room the men had made was a rock which extended out low over the water, just as I supposed the one did which hid our cave. So I jammed the pole under that one first, and I poked and pushed in all kinds of ways to get at a hole if there was any there. But I found only rock everywhere under and behind the edge, and I was sure that I hadn't got the right place there.

The next overhanging rock, though, was over on the opposite side from the room I was in, which I sort of named "the den" to myself—not exactly opposite, but nearly, and so it was too far to reach with the pole very well. I punched and jammed with the pole for quite a while at that one, too, but I couldn't be so sure that there was no hole under it, as I had been of the first.

It was after I'd taken a lot of time over this that I thought of the idea of tying another stick or pole to the long one and trying what a longer

reach would do, so I looked around in the den and found a piece of a stick about five feet long that I could use. I didn't find any cord at first, but I did in the end, when I looked in one of the boxes they had left unlocked, and in which they had told me I'd find my lunch for that noon.

Well, I tied the short stick to the long one and made a pretty fair job of it. And I was standing up to use it—for I'd been sitting on the sand to make the tie—when a piece of the cord that I had cut off after tying dropped over the edge of the pool into the water near the spring where we had got our drinking-water. And just the second it dropped it started away from the edge where I stood and began to sail slowly across the pool and right towards the place where I wanted to poke.

I stood still and watched. There was light enough down there to see the string as it floated, and I could follow it with my eyes without any trouble, and I hardly moved as it turned and twisted slowly around with the little current and made its way straight across and under that rock and out of sight.

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I picked up my spliced pole pretty quick after it was gone, and pushed it out into the water, too; and stooping down, I just let it slide out across the surface and let the current guide the end of it, till it reached the rock and went under the edge, and kept going and going till I had reached as far as I could. And it didn't touch and rocks ahead of it at all, but just lay free on the water, and I knew I had found the hole into the cave.

Well, I drew in the pole again and sat down to think; and, after I'd thought quite a while, a new idea occurred to me. I wouldn't dare try to swim across that pool myself, but maybe if I wrote a message and put it on something that would float, it would go out through just as Rick's hat had gone, and would lodge against the weeds in the brook outside just as the hat did. And so in a minute I was eager to try it.

Of course, the only chance I had to get my message to anybody was that Rick might just possibly take it into his head to come up and explore again, as we had planned to do, and that he might see a

board or something like that on which I would write, and then he would get somebody to search for me. It wasn't a very good hope, either, but it was possible. So I hunted around the cave and I found a round top of a kind of little cheese box, after a while, that seemed to be all right for my purpose.

So then I wrote a note on a sheet of paper, like this:

“RICK: I'm a prisoner in the big hole. The men are counterfeiterers. WITTER.”

Then I put the sheet down flat on the box cover, and tacked it on tight with some small nails I found, and it seemed ready to float away. But the last thing, just before I let go of it, I thought it would be better if I would put something white on it that would stand up a little and maybe attract more attention. So I got a stick and drove it into a crack in the cover, and then I tied my handkerchief tight around the top of it, so

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that it would hang and flutter in the breeze—if there was any breeze outside.

Well, when I put that little round boat down on the surface of the water and saw it start just as the string had started and sail right out across the pool, I tell you I felt more hopeful than I had since I met the men in the woods, in spite of the small chance there seemed to be that Rick might come up and find my message. It seemed like sending a letter that was going to do something for me. And it did do something for me, too, but not the least bit like what I had thought it might. But when it sailed out of sight under that overhanging rock I was pleased, I can tell you.

As I picked up the pole, intending to put it back where it belonged, however, I happened to notice one thing about the cave that I hadn't noticed before, and that was that over on the right, extending along the edge of the rocks, there was a little narrow ledge of rocks, that was just about wide enough to stand on, and it suddenly occurred to me that maybe I could walk along there if I

tried. I thought of using the pole, by pressing it against the rocks on the other side of the hole, to support me and to keep me from falling off, and as I began to study the matter, I thought I could see stepping places that would take me half way around the rocks.

My heart jumped with hope then, for I thought right away that maybe I could get far enough around that way to dare to let myself down into the water long enough to swim under the rock into the cave and so escape, and the minute it occurred to me my heart commenced to beat with excitement.

In two minutes I had taken off my coat and my shoes and stockings, and had tried walking along the edge of the den, with the pole supporting me out across the pool. And then, too excited to be really careful, I suppose, in the next minute I was starting along the ledge.

I would have been all right, too, I believe now, if everything had been just as I thought it would be. But I hadn't taken more than eight or ten

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steps, picking them cautiously along the rocks, before I found I would have to change the position of the pole, and when I came to do it, I found I couldn't, of course, because there was nothing to support me while I lifted it from one place to another. And all at once I found that I'd got myself into a pretty bad predicament, for, when I tried to step back, I suddenly discovered that I couldn't turn around without losing my balance, and without turning around I couldn't see where to step at all, because the steps were irregular and had to be figured out carefully. So there I suddenly found myself, caught tight, with the pole in such a position that I couldn't go forward another step without danger of its slipping, unable to back up the way I'd come, because I couldn't turn to look behind me, and with only the pole to hold me from falling into that icy pool at a point where I would have at least twelve of fifteen strokes to make before I could get back to the den.

CHAPTER XV

A PAINFUL SURPRISE

THE rocks had been hard enough on my bare feet before I found myself in the pickle I was in now. But, of course, just as soon as I found I couldn't stir either forwards or backwards from the place I'd reached, right away the sharp edges of the stones seemed to begin to dig into the bottoms of my feet. My arms began to feel tired quick, too, with holding myself up on the pole, and before I'd stood there a minute, realizing what a bad fix I was in, I knew that it wouldn't be many minutes more before I'd fall, sure.

I tried to turn my head around so as to see behind me, but I got dizzy when I did that. Then I tried feeling behind me for the steps I had put

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my feet on before, but I couldn't find one. Next, I tried just jumping the pole a little bit at a time along the rocks on the opposite side, but when I jumped it three times, and, instead of its going around as I tried to force it, its end dropped three or four inches towards the water each time, I gave that up, too.

Well, I don't know, but I think I was almost frightened out of my wits. I had got so terribly afraid of that deep, cold pool, and I knew so well that nobody was anywhere about to hear or help me if I could even holler loud enough to make my voice go up outside of the big hole, that I know I thought I would only just get drowned right then in that dark, horrible place, and sink just as the dog had. And I don't know how I hung on and stood there as long as I did. It was a long while, too.

But the time came at last when my arms and my knees commenced to get wabby, because I was straining so, and getting so tired; and then the thought that I was very foolish to stand there

and waste my strength so, when my only chance was in swimming, made me almost mad at myself for waiting even as long as I had. And I made up my mind that I would have a try to get away from there, anyway. So then I thought carefully what to do, and I did it right away, without waiting.

I first got down as low as I could by bending my knees, just keeping my feet on the path, resting my whole weight against the pole and leaning out over the water. Then I drew myself all down in a bunch, turned my head back toward the den—for it was much too far across to the cave opening—and then suddenly I threw the pole one side and pushed with all my might with my legs, and just dived out low over the water as far as I could go.

Down into that cold, cold pool I went with a big splash, and the next second the water was all over me, roaring in my ears, striking in like ice through my clothes on my arms and legs and breast, and oh, but it was cold, too! But I didn't wait a second. I just struck out fast and furious,

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swimming harder than I ever had in my life, and, quicker than I can write about it, I had reached out and grabbed hold of the den floor, and was pulling myself up out of the water, so glad to get there that I didn't care, in just that minute, even if I was a prisoner in a cave with about the only hope of getting away which I'd had just disappointed and gone.

Well, of course, I couldn't sit in those wet clothes a second, for the water was the coldest I was ever in in my life. I knew it would hurt me if I wasn't careful. So I undressed quick as I could. I threw some wood on the fire, too, for there was quite a lot there, stowed in a corner; and in a minute more I pulled the big curtain across the pool opening and was dancing around and swinging my arms and wringing out my clothes and then dancing again to get warm, with just the firelight around me in the den and the heat of the growing blaze making me feel fine after that cold plunge.

Of course I had to dry my clothes before I

could put them on, so I hung them over the boxes the men had sat on and drew them around the fire. I was glad I hadn't had on my shoes and stockings and my coat, because they are the hardest things to dry out if they get very wet.

I thought I'd better wrap one of the blankets around me to keep me warmer while I was waiting. So I pulled the ones I had slept on out of the corner where I'd seen Vilas put them that morning. And then, because they were too big to handle very well, I laid one on the floor and lay down on it, pulling the end of it around me and thinking I would just lie there a while till I could put my shirt and trousers on again, and then I would try to work some other scheme to get away, for I wasn't discouraged.

But, what do you think? I went to sleep. Just about as quick as I laid my head down and felt warm, I guess, I was dreaming. I hadn't had a wink all the night before, you know, and I guess I was tired out, though I didn't know it. And next thing I knew I was waking up to find the

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fire about all burned out, and my clothes all dry, and the shadows so changed around the edge of the hole that I knew it must be long after noon, at least, though it was still daylight outside.

Well, it was funny, but the first thing I thought of was that I had left the sounding pole lying in the pool when I fell, because I hadn't thought of doing anything else. But I knew I must get it in if I could, and stand it up where it belonged so as not to show the men when they came back that I had been trying to get away. So I opened the end of the curtain a little, quickly, to see how it had fallen.

I was at the side of the den opposite where the climbing-rope hung when it was down, and that was the side on which the curtain was pushed back when it was open. The cloth came close to the rocks on that side, and I didn't open it very much because I was a little chilly after getting out of my blanket, and I thought the air would be cold on my body without any clothes. As I pushed the curtain aside, I looked straight out across the

water to the rock that I knew overhung the opening into the cave, and, in a second, I saw something that made me forget for a minute everything else that had happened that day.

Right across the pool, almost from my very feet to the rock over the cave entrance, lay the sounding-pole, straight in the line of the current from the spring into the cave. And the instant I looked at it I saw that it was moving in a way the water never could make it move. And then, as I stood there watching, all at once I saw a man's hand come down from behind the rock and take hold of one end of the pole.

The shadow under the rock was a little less, in the light that now came down from up above, than it had been in the morning, because the light was reflected in under there by the water. I saw the hand as plainly as I could see yours if you should hold it up across the room from me, I guess, though it looked a little dark, perhaps. But the thing that it was doing was the exciting thing. It moved back and forth, pushing and pulling the

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pole, as if the man was trying to find out with the sounding-pole how wide the pool was, or whether the rock on my side was solid.

The end that lay towards me kicked up the water in little splashes and bumped against the rock of the den floor quite hard, and I began to be pretty sure that was what had waked me up. But I paid hardly any attention to that. The first thing in my mind was that some person had discovered the cave that Rick and I had found, and that probably that person might help me—unless it happened to be one of the counterfeiterers. The first part of the idea made me ready to holler and tell them I was there, and then the second part made me afraid to. So I stood still and watched again.

And then all at once I saw something else moving in the rock shadow, and in just a minute I made out the face of a man, bent clear over till his head almost touched the water, with his eyes just peering across at the den curtain.

I couldn't tell anything about who he was, for

his face was farther back in the shadow than his hand. But I thought out two or three things in the little time I saw him there. In the first place, he couldn't be anybody I need to be afraid of, I believed, because if he was one of the counterfeiters, he knew already that I was there. If he was somebody who had found my message to Rick in the stream, he would be a friend, sure. If he was the detective! Oh, when I thought that, how I did hope and hope, for even though I did want it to be a friend of mine, or of Rick's come to look for me, I couldn't really be very hopeful that it was, and somehow I was more ready to believe it was the negro detective. I don't know why I felt that way, but I did.

But I knew that whoever it was it couldn't hurt anything for me to show that I saw him, and so I just pulled the curtain one side quick, stepping behind it to keep myself out of sight, because I wasn't dressed, but putting my head down lower and looking back at him.

"Who's there?" I called out.

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Well, the man didn't move or say a thing for a second, but then he let go of the pole suddenly, and his head disappeared up behind the rock, and I was afraid right away that maybe he had been a stranger who was scared by seeing me. But before I had thought anything further, his face came down again, and he called across to me, his voice sounding as queer as could be—sort of like a voice through a megaphone on the football grounds.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am a boy, being kept prisoner here," I answered quickly.

He stood still, looking at me for a quiet minute. It must have been a very hard position to stand in, for his head was just about upside down, because he had to bend over so far to see out from under the rock. But he kept it there while he talked some more to me.

"Anybody there with you?" he asked.

"No," I answered. "Not now—I'm alone."

"Who's keeping you prisoner?"

"Some counterfeiters."

"Who are they?"

"A man named Benedict, and two other men."

He was still a minute, then he went on.

"How long have you been in there?" he asked.

"Since yesterday afternoon."

"Where are the men?"

"I don't know. They said they were going to be away all day."

He waited again a second, looking at me, and then he put out his hand and moved the pole around so that the end of it rested against the rock at one side of the opening.

"Why don't you climb out?" he asked then.

"I can't," I answered. "They use a climbing-rope, and they've pulled it up to the top."

"Oh!" he said. "Well, keep quiet. I'm coming down to see you."

And then he pulled his head back out of sight, there was a little splashing of the water, and he was gone.

I was about wild, I was so glad, for I was sure

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help was coming now to get me away. If the man would only just let down the rope so I could climb out of the hole, that was all he needed to do. And then I commenced to wonder how it was that he didn't ask more questions than he did about where the big hole was in the rocks, and I could only think that probably he must be somebody who already knew about where it was, just as Rick and I knew before we discovered the cave.

Well, I just grabbed my clothes and commenced to hustle into them, and I was all dressed and had the curtain pushed back inside of three minutes, I guess. Then I put the blanket I'd slept on away where Vilas had put it, and made everything just as near like it was before I fell into the pool as I could. I was so excited that I hardly could wait, too, though I knew it would take him fifteen or twenty minutes to get out of the cave and around up the rocks to the hole. I just had to walk up and down the floor of the cave, too, because I couldn't keep still, while I waited, and I wanted to yell and shout, only I was afraid to,

now. Then suddenly it occurred to me to pull the pole in out of the pool and put it up where the men kept it. And so, just to have something to do, I did that.

The stick I had tied on the end of the longer pole when I first commenced poking around with it was still fast to it, and so I took out my knife and cut it off. Then I stood the long pole up carefully, and was just turning to set the shorter stick back where I'd found it, when I heard a noise behind me. I turned quickly to look, and at first I couldn't see a thing. But pretty quick I caught sight of the end of the climbing-rope swinging against the rocks over at its corner.

Well, I was so much in hopes that now was the time when I was going to get away, and that, in just a few minutes, I would be out in the woods and on my way away from that horrible place, that I didn't think of anything but to run and grab that rope and begin to climb. And I didn't wait, either, but just rushed across and caught hold of the end and began to pull myself up, put-

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ting my feet anywhere where I could find a place for them. And I got four or five feet up off the floor of the den before I found that, as I might have known would happen, somebody was coming down from above.

It disappointed me a great deal right then, but it made me think that, whoever the man was who had found me, he wasn't afraid to do things. So I slipped back again to the floor, and then I stood and waited, eager and glad as I could be for the man to come.

But something was the matter. He had stopped and wasn't climbing down, and yet he was on the rope, I knew, because it hung out from the rock a little, as it wouldn't have done if no one had been holding it. I ran to the edge again and looked up. I took hold of the rocks and leaned out, trying to get far enough so as to see the top of the hole. But I couldn't make it.

I wondered what had happened, and I stood and waited and waited; and then I suddenly thought maybe the man was afraid, because he

had felt my weight on the rope, and then had felt me let go. He might think some trick was waiting for him, so I went to the edge again and leaned out.

"Hello!" I called up.

There wasn't any answer.

"Hello!" I called again.

Still no answer came.

"Why don't you come down?" I asked.

"There's nobody here but me."

I waited again then for a second; and then, all at once, the rope began to move again, and I could tell that the person was getting down. And I went and stood close by the end of it and held it lightly in my hand, to help him if he had any hard work finding the last steps with his feet.

I heard the kicking of his shoes against the rocks, and knew he was finding the places to put his feet. If I'd thought of it, I would have told him there were steps cut, but I didn't think. And then at last I saw his shoes coming, and then his trouser legs, and his knees and the bottom of his

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coat. And finally he suddenly swung himself down and in on to the floor of the den, as if he knew how awfully well. And he turned and looked at me, with his eyes just blazing. And who do you think it was?

It was Benedict!

CHAPTER XVI

PULL-AWAY IN EARNEST

I WAS so surprised and so disappointed that I just sort of staggered back away from him, as if he had pushed me. It was not only because I had expected to see somebody so different from Benedict, but because I had hoped and hoped help was coming to me, and, worst of all, because he would know, of course, that I was just ready to tell anybody who came along that he was a counterfeiter, and to give the alarm as soon as I got an opportunity, too.

Well, he came right after me. I backed away as far as I could till I was against the table at the back of the den, and I looked in his eyes and saw them all red and hot, as people's eyes look when

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they are pretty near worn out. And he was just about wild with anger about something.

I knew he was going to hurt me, and there wasn't any use just standing there and letting him do it, even as scared as I was. So when he reached out after me, I ducked down and jumped under his arm and ran for the end of the den. But he came right on after me, as if he meant to get me, anyway. He didn't say a single word, but just held his hands out with his fingers all open, and he looked just like an animal, so mad and so fierce.

I guess I would have yelled and screamed for fear of him then if I had been up on the ground. But down there in the rocks I didn't think it would do any good, and because he was still, I was, too, and I just seemed only to think that I wouldn't let him do anything if I could help it. He didn't come very fast towards me, and I had time to think, too, but I couldn't think of any way to keep free from him except to dodge and run and be quick. So I tried it.

I was all hot, all over now, and I was terribly excited. I leaned against the rocks as he came towards me, and I looked every way for something I could use, like a stick or a rock, to make him keep away. But he was between me and the sticks in the corner, and I couldn't reach anything then.

Well, I knew that if I let him come too close before I moved he would catch me sure, so when he was four or five steps from me I commenced to dodge, the way you do in pullaway at school. He wasn't very quick, I could see that, and he seemed so tired that he was almost like a weak old man in his actions. And when he began to dodge, too, and then to reach for me again, I pretended to be going to run towards the pool, and then I just jumped the other way and ran past him to the other end of the den.

But he just turned around, as patient as could be, and came on after me again, looking just the same, only now he sort of crouched down the way a cat does, as if he was going to jump on me

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the next time I dodged, and his face looked so awful that I was horribly afraid of him then. I would have run and grabbed the rope and tried climbing up quick out of his reach, only I knew he could take hold of the end and shake me off into the pool if I did.

Of course I was sure he would catch me in a minute or two, and I didn't know what to do. I supposed he was mad because of the noise I'd made, or something, and that he meant to do something terrible to me, and I was just desperate. I made up my mind I would fight as long as I could, for maybe he wouldn't be too strong for me now, when he was in such a bad condition, and maybe I could keep him from getting a chance to hurt me. So I edged over towards the corner where the sticks were, and a minute later I jumped and grabbed one.

But just the instant I jumped he did, too, and he was right on top of me before I could do anything. I picked up the stick and tried to raise it, but it wasn't any good, and when he grabbed it

it broke. Then I felt his hand come down on my shoulder, and while I ducked and dodged and struck at him, I could feel his fingers trying and trying to get hold of my collar. And then, suddenly, we backed up and stumbled on to the rest of the sticks, and both of us fell on the ground together, and I just rolled and kicked and wriggled right over him, and in a second I was out in the middle again and free.

My breath was so near gone that I could hardly get it at all, but I just rolled up on to my hands and knees and crawled, when I knew he wasn't so close to me, and I got clear across to the other end again, and I just had to take hold of the rocks there and pull myself up to my feet before I could stand up.

And then, when I looked around, there was Benedict lying on the ground just where he had fallen, on his back, with his arms stretched out, as if he was knocked unconscious, and his head lying on one side, as if it was hurt.

Well, I was half glad I was free from him, and

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half afraid he was hurt badly. But I could only think then of getting my breath, and I just stood there panting and watching him, and waiting to see him move. But he didn't move at all. He was as still as if he was asleep, and I couldn't tell whether he was breathing or not.

It didn't hardly seem possible that he was unconscious, because I couldn't think of anything that would have hurt him enough for that. He might have struck his head against the rock floor of the den, of course, but it seemed as if I could remember his trying to hang on to me as we rolled over the floor together, so that didn't seem very likely. I hadn't got hurt any myself, except the back of one of my hands, that was all scraped, and I didn't know that till I started to brush the sand off my face, and found blood all over my knuckles.

But Benedict lay so still, in such an uncomfortable position, and he looked so sort of huddled up and unnatural, that I began to think pretty soon that he was insensible. I thought at first

that he was just tired, and once I had an idea maybe he was drunk, because he acted so queer; but now I was sure he was hurt.

You know it was a pretty dim light back in the cave, away from the front where he lay, and I couldn't see him as well as I could have if he had been close to the edge of the pool. But I stood and watched him a long time before I made up my mind to move at all from where I was. And when I finally did decide to move, it was just in the most careful way.

Two thoughts kind of ran together in my mind. One was that there was the climbing-rope hanging down there now, just waiting for me to go and get hold of it and climb out and get away. The other was that maybe Benedict was a good deal worse hurt than I imagined, and that I ought to do something for him now. Maybe he would die if he had hurt his head or his neck very badly. And when I thought of that, I began to get very much frightened.

Still, I was more than half afraid that maybe

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he was playing 'possum, as the boys call pretending, and that maybe he would just grab for me when I went near him, and wouldn't let me get away again at all. He could easily do that if he wanted to.

I walked forward very carefully, then, and moved away from the end of the den. I went about the way you do when you go to look at a firecracker that hasn't gone off, but that may have a spark in it yet. It would be worse than any firecracker to have him suddenly jump and catch me. I could only see part of his face where he lay, and I moved around towards the pool side of the den to get more of a view, so that I could tell more about him. Then I crept along, quietly, and ready to jump back if he started for me.

But he didn't move. The light was getting less and less outside in the big hole, because the sun was going down, and so it was getting dimmer every minute in the den. But when I got where I could see the whole of his face turned towards me, I knew that he wasn't shamming. I never saw

anybody's face such a terrible color—all sort of bluish pale, his lips all purple and his forehead almost white. And across the temple, right beside his left eye, there was a long, jagged cut, that ran clear back into his hair over his ear, and it was bleeding slowly down across his cheek and his nose.

It looked terrible, and I believe when I saw him lying there like that, and thought maybe he was dying, I was really more frightened than when he had been chasing me. You don't know how bad you feel to see anybody hurt like that, even if it is your enemy, till you see it. You can't hardly imagine it, and I never had seen anybody lie like that before. But I knew that I had to do as much as I could right away to take care of him, and that I had to think of something besides running away.

I went right across to him and got down beside him. But when I took hold of one of his hands I was awfully startled, because there didn't seem to be any life in it at all. And when I started

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to raise his head up, it was heavy, and it seemed awful to think that he couldn't help himself even a little bit. That made me work harder and quicker, I tell you. I didn't know just how to tell whether he was alive and just fainted, or whether he had been killed by the blow on his temple. I'd heard lots of times that it's awfully dangerous to get your temple hurt. But pretty quick I thought to feel if his heart was beating, because, of course, it would be, so long as he was alive.

Father taught me one time how to find three or four places where you can tell whether a person's heart is beating or not. Of course, doctors usually feel your pulse in your wrist, but there's a pulse on your temple, too, and on the side of your lower jaw about half way from the corner of it to your chin, and in the hollow of your neck, and on the side of your neck, just in front of the big muscle that comes up under your ear. Somehow, when I tried, I couldn't find the pulse in Benedict's wrist, and I thought at first that there

wasn't any. But then I tried the side of his neck, and after a minute I felt the beat in the jugular vein, as they call it, though it's really a big artery that goes up to the brain. I would have tried to feel on his heart itself, but he had on a stiff-bosomed shirt, buttoned into a collar at his neck, that I couldn't get loose quickly.

Well, as soon as I felt his heart beat I knew he was alive, all right, and I felt better, though I was pretty scared for him even then. It isn't very much fun to have everything depending on you that way when there's nobody to help you, and you know only such a little bit about what to do. Of course I thought of climbing the rope and running up to the road above and trying to get somebody to come, but I didn't want to leave him lying the way he was. I knew that I ought to try to bring him back to consciousness if I could, and then maybe he would tell me what to do.

If you throw water in a fainting person's face it's a good thing to wake them up, and that was what I tried. Of course, you don't want to throw

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much, like a pail full or anything like that, because it might get into his nose and mouth and choke him when he breathes. But I got a cup off the table and ran to the spring, and I brought the cold water and poured it over his forehead, and I found his handkerchief in his pocket, and just soaked that and put it on his eyes, and I poured some water—just a little bit—on his lips. Of course, my own handkerchief was gone, because I had tied it on my little signal-boat that I'd sent off through the cave for Rick, so I had only his to use.

I kept doing that way with the water, and then I washed some of the blood away from his wound, too; but I couldn't bear to touch it, because it made me kind of faint to see what a bad and ragged cut it was. He didn't seem to be any better for quite a few minutes; but at last I suddenly heard him take a long breath slowly, and then, all at once, his eyes opened up and he looked up at me.

By this time it was getting almost dark in the

cave, and I could only see his face clearly by moving so that the little light that was left could come from the pool right on to it. And I moved that way as soon as I saw that his eyes were opening. But the minute he saw me he started and stared up at me, and his hand came up and took hold of my coat sleeve—not tight, as if he thought he had caught me now, but soft and easy, as if he just wanted to feel what it was made of.

It surprised me, and I was a little afraid of him, too, but I stayed still and kept putting water on his forehead.

“What’s the matter?” he asked me suddenly, with his voice all husky, like a sort of half whisper.

“You got hurt,” I answered.

He lay still, breathing sort of heavy, but getting better, I thought, each second.

“How’d I get hurt?” he asked me next.

“You fell on the rock. I guess you struck your temple. It’s all cut.”

He didn’t move, but just looked at me for a

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second. Then slowly he raised his hand and put it on his temple. "Knocked me out, did it?" he said.

"Yes," I answered.

"I was after you," he went on, and looked at me once more in the same queer, steady, only sort of half-awake way.

"Yes," I said

"Get me a drink of water," he said, as if he was commanding me.

He let go of my sleeve and I got up. I had the cup still in my hand, and I walked over to the spring. When I got there I filled the cup, rinsed it, and threw the water into the pool. Then I filled it again, and turned around to walk back.

I was thinking pretty hard. I wasn't so much afraid, now that I saw he wasn't going to die right then and there. If he could talk as much as he had I knew he would get better, or I was pretty sure he would, so I began to think of all the other things I had to think about right away. Here he was lying helpless, and he couldn't stop me from

trying to get away. The other men hadn't come back, and this was a chance I might not get again. I didn't believe Benedict could crawl the width of the den to prevent my getting to the rope, and if I should just go in a hurry, I could be out and away in two minutes, and I could send officers or somebody to take Benedict out and take care of his hurt afterwards.

I was so wild to go that I was just ready to drop the cup and run, but I didn't want to do that, because I couldn't really tell just what the man might be able to do if I showed too quickly what I was after. So I crossed over to him and gave the cup into his hand. And then, as he put it up to his mouth, trembling, too, while he did it, I stepped away from him to the front of the cave and felt for the rope in its corner.

And then—oh! can you understand how I felt?—my hands didn't find anything, and when I turned to look, dim as the light was growing in the corners, I knew, without any mistake, that the rope wasn't there at all. It was gone! Somebody had pulled it up!

CHAPTER XVII

TWO PRISONERS

I COULDN'T believe it. When my hands missed finding the rope, and my eyes looked and looked for it, up and down and at every place where it could be caught against the rocks, or even could have fallen down, I felt as if it just couldn't be true.

I knew the line had been hanging down there when Benedict had started to chase me, and I had looked over at it, two or three times afterwards, before I got so busy over him that I forgot it for a minute or two. It had been solidly fastened to whatever held it up under the rock when Benedict came down, that was certain, and it never would fall of itself—and it couldn't fall, anyway,

without my hearing it, I was sure, for it would have been pretty likely to strike the water and make a splash.

I stood holding on to the rocks and looking around and around and thinking and wondering and trying to figure out what had happened. Of course, the rope must have been hauled up by somebody who knew just where it hung. It must have been either Castle or Vilas, then, who had done it, though it seemed funny either of them should do it without coming down. Of course, one of them could have come back with Benedict, and might have been waiting outside, and it might have been the arrangement that Benedict was to stay there that night, while the others pulled up the rope and went away. But if that was so, why had the man up above waited so long before pulling up the line?

But while I was standing there, all at once I thought to turn and look at Benedict, and in a second I saw that he was watching me, and that he was as much surprised as I was.

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"Where's the rope?" he asked. He had turned on his side, with his hand under his head, and he still looked pretty sick, though it was getting so dark now that I couldn't tell much about whether he was pale or not.

"I don't know where the rope is," I answered.

He lay looking and looking and thinking, and then all at once he surprised me by saying, "It can't be Vilas!"

"Vilas?" I repeated.

"No," he said. "Unless he's come back and means to keep me down here."

He spoke pretty hoarsely still, but what he said made me wonder; yet I couldn't believe it was anything very serious right away. But very soon he went on.

"Vilas tried to get away from me," he said. "He's scared!" He looked at me queerly. "He's afraid he'll get caught by the officers or by—by Morse! He skipped off to-day, and I've been following him all day. I thought I got track of him coming back here. But if he did he just laid

for me, and now he's got us both down here, where we'll stay for a week at least, till Castle gets back from the city."

"A week!"

"Yes—a week. And there isn't food enough down here for one man for two days!"

Well, that made me more astonished than afraid at first. Benedict talked so easy about it that it seemed as if he really didn't believe the things he said. And yet, if it was so, why both he and I stood a pretty good show of starving.

"You don't mean that Vilas wants you to starve?" I asked him quickly, and I came back into the den again, because I'd given up looking for the rope.

"Yes," answered Benedict. "He'd like that first rate, I guess."

"And Castle's gone for a week?"

"Yes."

"Won't he possibly come any sooner?"

"No."

"Doesn't anybody in the world know about this place but those two?"

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“No—and we can’t get out till one of them comes to help us.”

He lay quiet, and he still seemed as if he didn’t care, though he talked different from any way I’d ever heard him talk before—so quiet and easy, and not seeming to mind telling things to me, though he’d hardly spoken to me the rest of the time he had been in the den.

“How’d you get down here in the first place?” I asked, for I was getting all stirred up now with the idea that we wouldn’t just lie there and starve without trying something. And it made me think perhaps he wasn’t quite in his right mind, because he took it so easy as he did. But he answered sensible enough.

“We used a rope the first time we came down,” he said. “Nobody could make it without.”

It seemed easy for him to talk, so long as he talked low, but I guess he was feeling pretty bad in his head all the time, for he kept putting his hand up to his forehead, and then to his temple.

“How’d you know this cave was here?”

"We didn't, and it wasn't here. We dug it out."

"Dug it out! Where's all the dirt?"

"At the bottom of the pool, if there is any bottom," he said, looking up at me.

And all at once I remembered the day Rick and I had found the cave, and how we had been scared because the water turned roily, and I thought in a minute that I knew the reason now why the mud came out in the stream. One of the men had come back to the den after we'd been there, probably, and had been digging again while we were in the cave—and we had heard the splashing of the dirt he had thrown into the pool, too, when we had listened at the opening under the rocks and couldn't understand it.

But thinking of what Rick and I had done that day made me think again about that opening under the rocks, and I couldn't help believing that there might be some way to get out through that way, if we had to, rather than starve; and all at once I began to think that if I tried it the same

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way by which I had got back to the den when I was caught on the ledge trying to get around the hole, perhaps I could make it that way. If Benedict hadn't been there I would have been ready to try it right then, but I wanted to think before suggesting it.

At last, though, I made up my mind that we might as well think out what we would try, so I started to talk to him about it.

"Isn't there any way we could get out through the cave?" I asked.

He looked at me, and then looked all around the den room, as if he didn't understand. "No," he said at last, shaking his head.

"Oh!" I answered, "I mean the other cave."

His eyes opened wide at me. "What cave?" he asked, louder and more sharply than he had spoken since he got hurt.

It surprised me, and I suddenly wondered if maybe his hurt had made me forget about the way he had talked to me across the pool from under the rock over there. So I answered right out.

"The cave under the rocks," I said.

"Under the rocks?"

"Yes—where the water goes out of the pool."

"Oh," he answered. "Why, no, you little nin-kum! The outlet of the pool is 'way down under water here somewhere, and that water is as cold as salted ice. Nobody knows where the water goes to, either. It may travel a mile underground."

I listened to him with my astonishment just growing and growing. I didn't know what to make of what he was saying. It couldn't be that he thought he could fool me now, after talking with me from the cave, and he knew, of course, that I had seen him. But when I looked at him I was almost sure that he wasn't trying to fool me, for he seemed to be just feeling sort of contempt for me, because I was so foolish.

And then, all at once, while I was looking at him, the wildest kind of a hope came suddenly to me—and that was that maybe—just possibly, the person who had talked to me from the cave open-

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ing hadn't been Benedict at all, and in a second my thoughts were whirling and whirling. If it wasn't Benedict, who was it? I couldn't tell, but, as I had thought before, if it was anybody outside of this counterfeiter gang, then he would be a good friend to me, because anybody would try to have them caught and to help a boy, who was a prisoner, to get away. And right away I began to believe mighty easily that it had been the man I saw in the cave opening who had pulled up the rope after Benedict had come down, and that the reason he had done it was because he had seen Benedict come down, and wanted to keep him there till he could go for help.

I knew my face was getting red because it was so hot, but I knew Benedict couldn't tell that now, for it was just like twilight in the den. But all of a sudden he ordered me to light the light.

"Get a match off the table there and light the lantern," he said. "And then get a blanket and spread it down here for me to roll over on to. My head aches as if the top would come off."

I did as he said pretty quick, but I stopped being scared while I was at it, for I was suddenly so sure that he didn't know about the cave under the rocks that I just knew the man who had been in there and who had talked to me would be coming back before long to help me or to capture Benedict, and, whatever he came for, it meant that I would get away.

I lighted the lantern without much trouble, and then Benedict made me draw the curtain and put some wood on the fire again. And I did everything he said, right away, willing now to just wait till whatever was going to happen should happen. And I got the blanket, as he asked me to, and put it down on the floor beside him, and held one side of it up for him to roll under it. And then I covered him up.

He didn't try even once to get up. I guess he was dizzy or something. And when he was on the blanket he lay so quiet that I thought maybe he had fainted again. But after a while, when he moved a little and put his hand to his head again,

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I began to think that maybe just the fact that he was so quiet meant that he was getting to feel better.

I sat down on a box by the table and waited for him to talk again. I listened, too, now, because all the expectation I had had about somebody coming had returned to me, and I was just as eager as ever, and as nervous, too. I looked at Benedict, lying on the floor, and I remembered how Vilas had been lying there in almost the same spot just the night before, and I thought suddenly of all the things that had happened, and how they hadn't done me a bit of good, for here I was just in the same position I had been in the other night. And I sort of wondered how I could be so hopeful about what would happen next. But I was hopeful, and I meant to be ready to do whatever I could, too, when anybody came.

But I hadn't thought of what Benedict might do. I was right in the middle of all the thoughts about escape, and the hopes of getting back to the camp and to the boys, and all that, and thinking it

had been a mighty long time since I had seen them, too, when all at once Benedict pushed the blanket one side and looked at me.

"Pull out your blanket and lie down," he said. "I've got to sleep, and I won't have you sitting around."

I was pretty slow to get up, because I didn't want to do that for two reasons. One was because I was anxious to keep a good watch, for the first thing that would show that anybody was around. And the other was that I was all at once getting hungry and remembering that I hadn't had anything to eat since breakfast, so I sat still a second.

"Do as I tell you!" Benedict said suddenly, raising up on his elbow higher than he had at all since he had fallen. "If you think I can't get up and make you, I'll show you pretty quick."

Well, I didn't want him after me again then, even though I didn't believe he could chase me around much. His handkerchief, which he still had on the cut over his temple, was all soaked with blood now, and I knew he must be feeling pretty

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bad. I was almost ready to feel sorry for him, too, because his wet, blood-stained face looked so awfully sick in the lantern light.

So I moved and got up, and went right to the corner and pulled my blankets out once more. Then I went and got a drink at the spring, and then I lay down. Benedict didn't move while I was doing it all; but when I was done, and was just stretching out on the blanket, he lay down, too, and in a second everything was as still as could be.

I hadn't any idea of going to sleep at all. I thought nobody who knew I was there would wait all night to come for me. But I did go to sleep, just as I did in the day time, because I wasn't all rested, I suppose; and when I woke up it was late in the night, and the fire was low, and there was just the dim light of the lantern still burning in the den.

I felt tired, too, then, and didn't seem to care much for anything but sleep; but as I turned over and stretched out, and was just closing my eyes

again, something suddenly coming between me and the light made me know that somebody was moving around. And, when I opened my eyes again, there by the table, with his face toward me and his back to the lantern, was the black shadow of a man—not Benedict—standing, bending forward, and, though I couldn't see his eyes at all, I knew in an instant that he was watching me.

CHAPTER XVIII

A WRESTLING MATCH

So MANY things had happened to startle and scare me in the time since I had been in the cave that I was expecting something almost every minute. I was almost sorry I couldn't go to sleep again without bothering, I think, and I guess I wasn't more than half awake, anyway. But when the man started to tip-toe across the den towards me, and bent down over me, with his hand on my arm, I opened my eyes wide and looked in his face. And it was the negro!

I guess I would have hollered with gladness then if I'd dared, for, if he was a detective, this surely would end all my trouble, and I would be free in a few minutes now. But he held his hand

up quick, as if he was afraid I would make a noise, and I thought he was crosser than he needed to be about it.

"Keep still, you," he said.

I lay back on the blanket. "I will," I answered, whispering.

He looked down at me a minute, and then he bent over me and held his face close to mine.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

And then I was sure. "Yes," I answered. "You're a detective."

He kept still, just looking at me, and then suddenly he grinned at me. "How did you know?" he asked.

"I guessed," I said, feeling a little proud.

"Good guess," he answered. "But keep still," he added, getting up. "I've got to make things safe here."

I lay as still as I could, and just watched him. He went over to the table first, took up the tools there, one after another, and then dropped them quietly into a bag that lay beside the table, and

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which I found pretty quick was the one that had been under the table with the money in it. Then he took the plates of the two-dollar bill out of the box and wrapped them in a cloth that he had, and put them into the bag, too. And then he tied the bag up tight, and lifted it up and set it on the table under the lantern, which had been hung on a hook in the ceiling.

As he turned away from the table I saw him reach into his pocket and take out a revolver and hold that in his hand. Then, all at once, he walked across, put his foot on Benedict's body, under the blanket, and began punching and rolling him.

"Wake up, wake up!" he said. "It's time to get up and take your medicine!"

That sounded funny, and I was almost ready to laugh at it; but when Benedict began to move, I was too much interested in watching him to think of funny things, so I watched and watched.

Benedict pulled the blanket away from his face with both hands, and looked up with the most sur-

prised look in the world. And when he was really awake—for it was perfectly clear that he had been asleep—he just lay quiet and looked up, studying.

“Well?” he said, at last.

“Well,” answered the negro, with his foot still on the man.

“Who are you?” asked Benedict.

“You may know me, if I tell you my name, and you may not.”

“What are you doing here?”

“I’m just investigating.”

“Investigating what?”

“This cave.”

“What for?”

“Counterfeiters!”

Benedict was silent a moment. Then he tried to start getting up, but the negro pushed him down with his foot.

“Wait now,” he said. “I’ve got all the evidence right here in that bag. Don’t worry. I’ll handle you all right *this* time.”

“*This* time!” exclaimed Benedict. They both put the emphasis on *this*.

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"Yes, *this* time. I've got you at last, Benny, old boy!"

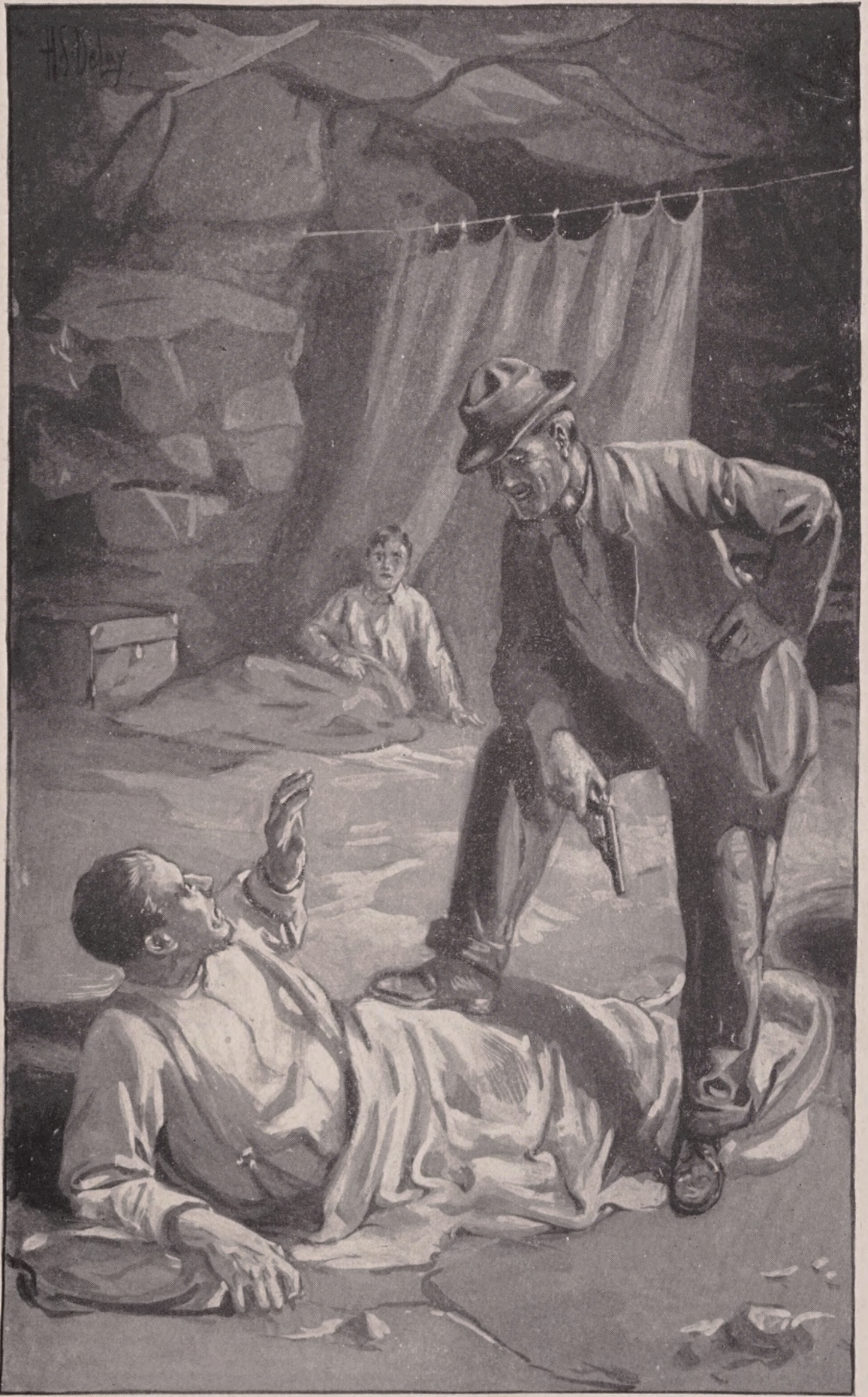
Benedict lay still again. I thought maybe he was trying to think of a way to get free and scheming to get the better of the detective, and I was afraid of what he might do if he was given half a chance. But the negro was too much awake to be caught. He held his revolver out where Benedict could see it.

"No foolishness, boss," he said, imitating the negro talk for the first time since he came. "Get up, now, and do as I tell you," he went on.

Benedict crawled out of his blanket, and stood up slowly. He didn't seem to be feeling well at all, and I couldn't wonder at that, either, because he was caught as sure as could be, if anybody could be sure of anything. But when he stood up he turned and looked at the negro so questioningly that it seemed to me he was sort of half believing that he had been tricked in some way.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Ask the boy there," the negro said, nodding at me. "It didn't take *him* long to guess."



"I'VE GOT YOU AT LAST, BENNY, OLD BOY!" [Page 258.]

Benedict looked at me a second, but then he looked back at the negro.

"I'll give you three guesses," said the negro, grinning again.

But Benedict didn't answer. He seemed to be hardly able to stand up at all, and he backed away from the negro, till he got to the table, and half sat down on that.

"Who am I, youngster?" asked the negro of me, over his shoulder.

I sat up on my blanket now, and looked at them both. I thought the detective was having a good deal of fun with Benedict, and I began to think how terrible it must be to be caught the way he was and to know that this meant years in prison for him. And I was really sorry for him for a second, till I remembered what he had done. Then I spoke, because they seemed to be waiting for me to speak, though they neither of them looked at me, only just steadily at each other.

"He's a detective Captain Benson sent," I said.

"That's it—a detective from Captain Benson,"

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repeated the negro. "You know who Benson is, don't you, Benedict?"

He was grinning all the time, and seemed to be enjoying every word he said to Benedict, and to be glad his prisoner was so scared. And Benedict was scared, too—a great deal more so than I would have thought he could be, when he had seemed to care so little about the rope being pulled up and when we thought we might have to stay a week in that hole with no food.

Then, all at once, the negro stopped grinning and leaned forward at Benedict, and just pushed his face right up close to the white man's.

"Do you know *now* who I am?" he asked, and in such a savage way that it made me afraid, too, because he was so fierce.

But Benedict's head just dropped, and he looked as if he was ready to fall off the table to the floor. If the other man hadn't caught hold of him, I guess he would have fallen, too.

"Here boy, come here," the negro said. "Take this line here," he said, pulling a roll of heavy

cord out of his pocket, "and tie this fellow's hands. He's a dangerous character."

I took the cord. I didn't like to have to do it very well, but, if it would help, I knew I ought to.

"Get up and put your hands behind you," the negro ordered, and Benedict slowly stood up. His eyes, which had been on the ground, came up to the detective's face in such a way that it was plain to see he was terrified as could be.

He stepped out from the table a little and put his hands behind him, and I stepped around to put the cord on his wrists. I wasn't sure I would know just how to do it, but I thought I could tie them tight. I had unfastened the cord on the ball and had unrolled a little of it, and was all ready to begin, when, all at once, the hands I was going to tie separated and flew away from before my eyes, and I jumped aside and looked around in time to see Benedict throwing his arms around the detective's body, holding the detective's arms fast to his sides, and next second they were whirling around the room of the den, as if they were dancing the wildest dance you ever heard of.

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It was so quick, and, after it started, so furious, that I didn't even understand it till they were in the crazy wrestling match, for that was what it was. And then all I could do was to stand and watch them, astonished at the quickness Benedict had shown and at his strength in hanging on, and just amazed to see how helpless the negro was to break away from his grip, though he was struggling with all his might.

Around and around they went, scuffling up the sand, bumping into the table, kicking the boxes out of their way. They banged into the rocks at one end of the den, and then whirled away down the room and over towards the edge of the pool. Then they came back again towards me, and I knew they'd hit me and probably just crush me against the table if I didn't dodge. And I jumped to the end of the table and then climbed up on it to be out of the way.

Frightened? I never saw anything like that awful wrestling in all my life. Benedict was hanging on just as if he couldn't let go, and the negro

was tearing and fighting and jerking and wrenching to get even an arm free. They staggered one way and then another. Once I thought sure they would go into the water next minute, and another time I thought that was just where Benedict was trying to drag the detective. Then they would strike against the walls so hard that you'd think it would break their arms. They stood almost still twice, and I could see then that the negro's hands were locked around Benedict's back, too, and that he had dropped his revolver somewhere in the scuffle, though I hadn't heard it and couldn't see it on the floor. Finally they had one awful struggle right at the edge of the rock floor, and even hit the curtain two or three times, till they whirled suddenly away in again, when one of them raked his feet right through the dead fire, and the ashes flew all over the room in a cloud. And then when the whole air was thick with the dust, down they went at last, and rolled over and over till they struck against the end of the den, and stopped.

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How in the world Benedict's strength lasted all through it I don't know, for he had been so weak after his fall, and apparently so tired and worn out when he had first came back to the den in the afternoon, that I had expected every second he would give out. But he must have been bluffing, partly, anyway, about feeling so bad. And it wasn't till they were on the floor at the end of the den, smack up against the rocks, that he did give out. And then he fainted again. I didn't know it at once, of course, but when the negro got up from the floor, after lying there a minute, and Benedict lay still, I understood.

You never saw two such looking men. They were covered with ashes, from head to foot, their faces full of them. Benedict's wound on his temple was bleeding again, and the detective had been cut in the lip, and that was bleeding. Their hands were all bruised up where they had struck the rocks, and their clothes were all pulled apart in every way, almost.

But the negro didn't wait a second. He was

panting and gasping, but he come across and grabbed the string out of my hands, for I was still holding it, and then he went and turned Benedict over on his face and corded his hands up tight behind him. Then when he was done he turned to me.

"See how that was done?" he asked.

"Yes, partly," I answered, half afraid of him, because his eyes were glittering so, and because he was so savage about it.

"Well," he answered, "turn around here and I'll show you how it's done, once for all. I may want help from you again."

I hesitated, for I didn't know why he should do that, but he reached out and caught me by the shoulder, twisting me around so quick that it nearly tripped me up.

"Do as I tell you," he said, and so I put my hands behind me, crossed, and tried to pay attention, for I thought he really believed it was necessary to teach me how to tie the cord.

He put the cord around my wrists, over and under and across and back, and drew it tight.

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"Oh!" I said, "that hurts!"

"It ought to hurt," he answered, still breathing hard. "If it doesn't hurt it won't hold. There, I guess that would hold you all right, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," I answered; "but please untie it now. It cuts so!"

"No," he said. "I guess I'll leave that on there for a while, just to teach you a lesson."

He cut the end of the long cord off, and turned me around.

"Now sit down on that box and stay there till I tell you to move," he said, sort of mad. And he pushed me down on a box by the end of the table.

"But you needn't keep me tied up," I said, for it made me pretty mad that he should treat me so.

"Why needn't I?" he asked.

"Because. It's just as if I was one of the counterfeiters, the way you're doing."

"How do I know you aren't one of the counterfeiters?" he asked, turning away from me.

I was so surprised I couldn't answer for a sec-

ond, and he went over to where Benedict was lying. He turned the man over and looked in his face. Then he felt his pulse, just as I had that afternoon. But this time Benedict came back to consciousness again without any water, and right while the negro was bending over him, and the first I knew, he was beginning to moan and cry and beg.

"I know you!" he said. "Oh, I know you, all right! Don't do anything to me! Let me go! I'll do anything you say! I'll give you anything I've got! I'll——"

Then the negro stood up.

"Cut it!" he said. "That won't do you any good. 'I've got you now, and I've got you right, and I guess it'll be you that gets it this time. I can turn you over to the sheriff or the secret service officers, and give them just your tools and stuff here, and you'll go up for counterfeiting. Or I can just keep you here till I decide what else I might do with you. This is pretty convenient here, this is. I can wait. I'll have plenty of time here."

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I stared at him. He seemed to be a queer kind of man. But I didn't have time to think much about what made him act so, for he turned on me then, too.

"And you," he said. "You're a nice, convenient boy, too, you are. But you happen to be convenient to me this time. I saw you splashing in the water here yesterday, and I found your little raft down the stream, with the note to your friends. That's how I got in here if you'd like to know how you helped me."

He stopped and looked at me a minute, and, for the first time, I began to think there was something about him that I knew, something familiar. I leaned forward and stared hard at him in the lantern light, but I couldn't make anything of his black, ashes-covered face. But then, all at once, he suddenly threw his head back in his collar, and his mouth opened, and he commenced to laugh—a dry, silent laugh that didn't seem to have the least fun in the world in it. And, oh! I knew him in an awful second, when my heart

sank to the very lowest it could ever go, and when my body seemed to get cold with fright.

He was Morse—Lemuel Morse, the escaped convict!

CHAPTER XIX

RECOGNITION

I DON'T believe anybody could have known him right away, with his beard shaved off and his hair cut short, and with the sort of brownish-black color all over his face. I found out afterwards that he had used a sort of dye to color his face and hands and head with, and he imitated the negro talk so well that nobody knew him, not even men like Benedict and Vilas and Castle, who had all known him before. I believe Benedict didn't know who he was till the time just before he jumped on to him and they began their fight.

I can remember almost everything about how I felt the other times when I was scared there in the den, but I don't seem to know just what I

thought about when I recognized Morse. All I can think of when I try to remember is just how his horrible black face laughed and laughed while I sat there and stared at him. He seemed so pleased with himself because he had tricked me so and because he had tricked Benedict, and the first thing he did after he had laughed was to begin to tell what clever things he had done. And he just gloated over us, and snapped his fingers in Benedict's face and made fun of me, and called the police and the prison keepers all fools, and went on till you'd almost think he was crazy.

I'll never forget it. It was horrible.

"Detective!" he said, laughing in my face. "I'm a detective! That's good! You're a clever boy, all right. You're a fine, nice boy. You're a smart boy. And you're the boy that got me caught last year—caught and sent up. The boot's on the other foot now, ain't it? I guess I caught you with the counterfeiters, didn't I? I guess I can get even now, can't I?" Then he turned to Benedict.

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“Who did you think it was spying around here last night—the dog? You didn’t think old Lem Morse was so close, did you? You didn’t know he’d watched in the woods here for you for a week and seen you come and go. You didn’t know he’d been down in your slick little cave here and got some of your slick little two-dollar bills, and showed ’em up for counterfeits around the whole country up here, did you? You didn’t know it was me made it hard for you to pass the stuff.”

He went over to Benedict and took him by the shoulders and lifted him up, setting his back against the rocks. Then he pulled the curtain one side.

“Look!” he said, pointing across the pool. “You didn’t know there was a way in and out of this place better than over the rocks, did you? Did you ever go through the cave that opens behind those stones over there? The kid here knows it is there. I know, because he sent a float through there to warn his friends that he was in here.”

He turned to me suddenly. "But it won't do any good now," he added, "because I got to it first."

Then he whirled back to Benedict. "Why, even the dog found his way out through that cave," he went on. "What did you think became of the brute after I threw him down in here? I knew you heard me up in the bushes. It was the only time I made a fool move that came close to putting you wise. I threw the dog down here to make you think it was him. And you fell to it, too, didn't you?"

He began walking back and forth up and down the den. I got as far back beside the table as I could, too, for he was just like an animal that you see in the zoo, walking and walking in his cage and looking at you out of the corners of his eyes, as if he'd take the first chance he could to reach out like lightning and claw you.

"You thought you could run this gang the way old Morse used to, did you?" he began again, to Benedict. "Why, you wouldn't last three months,

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you wouldn't. You'd have got caught without any help from me—you and all the rest of them. You all hated old Morse, and you're all afraid of him, but he's the one that knows how. Humph!" He laughed. "The dog knew more than the lot of you, and the youngster here twice as much!"

Of course, what he said made me understand a lot of things, and I wondered so much at it all that I got half confused. But from what he had said, and what else he told us, I found out pretty near all that had happened. He had been out of prison now about three weeks, and he had had a pretty hard time getting enough to eat and keeping out of sight. But nearly all the reports about him the papers printed were not true. But he told us that he did try to see Midgely's girl, as he called Flora, over at the sanitarium at Frayne, and then to show how clever he was he said that he met the very detective who was sent by Captain Benson to look for him, and led him off into the woods and made him believe that he was only a negro who had been sent by the real Morse with

the note to Flora. And then, to fool everybody after he knew the detective had gone back to the city, he wrote and carried another note to "Midgely's girl," making believe it was from the detective.

He told Benedict about meeting me at the country store and getting me to change the two-dollar bill for him, too, and he laughed and laughed over my believing he was a detective, and over the way I had acted about the money. He talked and talked, first mad and bitter at everybody, and then making fun of everybody and telling how smart he was. And you couldn't help thinking he was smart, too, because he had certainly fooled a lot of people. Oh, yes, and he told about climbing trees to watch people, and how he happened to wear the climbing-irons, because he used to be a telephone linesman once in the city, and he knew just how to handle them.

Benedict just sat still and listened and watched and watched him, all through it all. Of course, it wasn't Benedict who had been in the den with

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me when the dog fell into the pool, but Vilas had told him about it, so I guess he understood all about the whole story. Morse, I guess, thought Benedict had been there. But he told about lying in the bushes for hours and hours and watching to see who came to the big hole, and when, so that he could know when to come himself; and he told all about how he had come down himself the first time on the very night after Rick and I had found the cave, although he didn't know just when we had found it. And he told, too, that he had been watching every day for Benedict to come back to the hole alone so that he could catch him there when the others were away. And at last he told how he had seen Benedict come down the evening before and had come up behind him and pulled up the rope.

It was a long time before he ended all he had to say and before he got through crowing about it. I suppose he thought it didn't matter how much he told us now, because we couldn't see or tell anybody else till he got ready to have us. But at the

end he gave us a startling piece of news, and that was that it had been he who had frightened Vilas the day before. Then I found out that it was true, as Benedict had said, that Vilas had run away from him, and there was no danger of his ever coming back, Morse said, because he knew Morse had come and would turn the whole crowd over to the police. He seemed to know that Castle had gone to the city, too.

Well, I wasn't much afraid of being turned over to the police, but I could hardly believe that was what Morse meant to do, for he laughed as if he was joking every time he spoke of it. The way Benedict kept watching him and watching him, too, made me feel a great deal more afraid than I had felt before, because it seemed as if Benedict had just about given up every hope in the world, and was just expecting something awful to happen. His eyes just followed Morse around, while he had a little scowl on his face, with a queer look on his mouth—all drooping, as if his courage was scared out of him. And in the end I found

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that what he did intend to do was a good deal worse than giving information to the police.

It was while Morse was still talking that I noticed it was beginning to get light out in the hole. You know it was coming morning again. Before he stopped telling all the things he had done, it was almost light enough to see things without the lantern. At last, too, he seemed to notice it, and when he did he stopped talking as short as if he didn't mean to ever say another word.

He began looking around the den then. He had already gathered up the counterfeiting tools and those things. Now he went and looked at the box in the corner, which had a lock on it, and he examined it. And when he had asked Benedict for the key, and Benedict had said Vilas carried it away, he took a heavy hammer and just smashed the top board right through, and then pried the lock with an iron bar till he broke it open.

He took the gun out that had been put in there, and then he found some cartridges for it, and he

put them in his pocket. Then he pulled out the things to eat that were left, and set them up on the table. And when I saw them I just commenced to feel faint, because it was so long since I'd had anything. But he didn't pay any attention to me or to Benedict then, and went on looking for things in the chest. He didn't find much else, though.

After that he started up the fire again with some soft wood and shavings, and I was glad he did that, for I was cold, I can tell you, and I felt just about sick. But I had been so afraid I'd hardly thought about it till Morse began to be quiet. When he sat down on one of the boxes, though, and began to eat, he turned and laughed at us again as if just to bother us because we hadn't anything. And while he ate I couldn't look at him, because it made me feel so sick.

It lasted an awfully long time. The cord hurt my wrists horribly, and the box I was sitting on was so uncomfortable that I thought my back would about break in two if I couldn't change

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pretty soon. But I didn't dare, for every time I even twisted around Morse's eyes would come over to me quick as lightning, and open up a little in a fierce sort of way, as if he was just ready to hit me if I stirred. So I sat there and sat there, about as miserable as anybody could be, and with my heart just beating hard every time I thought to remember that this man who had us in his power was Morse, the leader of the silver thieves, whom I had helped send to prison. I could just about have screamed sometimes, because I felt so hopeless and desperate over being caught so. And when I remembered the night at school when I had thought Mr. Lally was Morse coming into my window to look for me, and how the boys had laughed afterwards, I thought they wouldn't laugh much now if they could see me or if I ever saw them again.

But when I thought that, I suddenly remembered that I'd made up my mind I wouldn't be a coward, whatever happened to me, so I just set my teeth hard to keep down the sick feeling and

to keep from begging Morse to let me go, as I almost was ready to do once. But I did keep still.

Well, when Morse had eaten all he wanted, he gathered up what was left, which wasn't much, and he went to the edge of the pool.

"Benedict," he said, "look, and I'll show you where the dog went." And he threw all the stuff out into the pool. There was a wooden dish in which the Frankfurters had been, and when it struck the pool it happened to be right-side up, and floated, of course. The rest of the stuff sort of floated, too, but the dish stood up, white and light, and the minute it was in the current it showed which way the flow was, and started sailing right away towards the overhanging rock. In just a minute, too, it sailed right under the edge of the rock and was drawn back into the darkness of the cave and disappeared.

We all watched it, and when I looked at Benedict I saw that he was as much interested as I was, maybe more.

"Now," said Morse, "you know how deep and

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how cold the water is here. Even a good swimmer wouldn't have much show of getting across to that opening. I know you can't swim, Bennie, any more than I can, and I never learned. The boy here won't dare try it, for he's had one taste of it, as I know, for I saw him. It occurs to me that this prison here is just as good a place as any other prison, and I'm thinking I'd better just let well enough alone and leave you here. Perhaps the birdies and the squirrels will bring you something to eat for a day or two, while I'm getting off to South America or somewhere, and then I'll write to the authorities—Captain Benson, for instance—to come and give you a transfer. Maybe by the time they get here you'll be ready for a change, even to a regular prison. Of course, I couldn't think of letting you starve, though as to that I can't be responsible, you know, if my letter from South America might happen to miscarry."

I couldn't believe he meant what he said, but the way he looked at Benedict at the end made me just grow all cold with horror of him again.

"I think I'll take Castle to South America with me," he added, after a minute. "He's the only good man in the gang now, and if he hasn't got into jail down in the city, I guess he'll go with me when he learns what's happened up here. That'll leave this place here to yourselves, and you won't be likely to be disturbed, I guess."

He stood still on the edge of the pool, looking out and kicking the rock softly with his foot, grinning to himself, and that's the way I can remember him the clearest as I think of all that happened.

But pretty soon he turned and came across to me.

"I guess you can't either of you do much damage for a while," he said, "but I think I'll make sure that you'll take some time getting started." And then he took the cord, and tied it around my hands again, and then tied it around the table leg. Then he lifted the bag of tools and threw them back against the wall on top of the table.

"I won't take those, either," he said. "They'll

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do more good here when the officers find you—if they ever do.”

Then he went across and tied a cord to Benedict's hands and he made him draw up his knees, and then he tied the cord down around and around his feet, till it was sure that all he could do would be to roll, if he could do even that. And then, after it was all done, he stood and looked at us and laughed again quietly.

“Good-by,” he said. “You'll do for a few days, anyway. I'll pull up the rope after me when I'm up and cut it.” And then he went to the climbing-rope and, without another word, but only turning his grinning face towards us as long as we could see him, he climbed slowly up out of sight. And when he had reached the top he drew the rope up, as he had promised, and next instant it all came whirling down with a great splash into the pool, and straightened out like a water serpent to float away through the cave.

CHAPTER XX

THAT TWO-DOLLAR BILL

IN an instant after the spray of the rope's splash had fallen, it was as still all over the woods and rocks as if nobody in all the world was stirring. Of course it was very early in the morning, and you wouldn't expect that anybody would be around yet. But it was so quiet after all that had happened that it seemed as if all the noises in the world had stopped at once.

I was about hopeless, and so cold and sick, and feeling so bad that I didn't know what to do. But even at that I was glad that Morse had gone. He was such a terrible man that, even if he had left us the way he had, with almost no chance that anybody would find us or help us, it seemed for a minute easier to have him away.

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I looked over at Benedict, and he looked at me. He was already trying to get out of his cord, but I could see that it was going to be terribly hard, and was going to take him a long, long time. He pulled and twisted and rolled around, but it was plain to see that he was so bruised and hurt from his wrestling and from the wound he had got in his fall the night before, that he could do very little at a time, before he had to stop and rest.

I knew, too, that even if I saw that he was getting away it wouldn't do me any good, for if he saw a chance to escape he wouldn't help me at all, I was sure, for he would rather leave me there than to have me make an alarm. So I began to try and see if I couldn't find a way to get loose, too.

At first it didn't seem any use, for the cord we were tied with was stout linen cord, a quarter of an inch thick, I guess, and it was so tight on my wrists that I couldn't move my hands without its feeling as if it would cut through the flesh. And I couldn't work very long at a time on it, either, because I got tired.

But, as I kept on trying, some way I commenced to feel better. I got warmer and my stomach felt better. Father told me afterwards that it was probably because I was getting my blood all warmed up again, and because having something to do gave me some hope. And just as I began to feel better I found out something that helped me. I found that I could move the cord on the table leg up and down without very much trouble, and in a second I knew that if I would work it that way I could wear it in two after a while.

But when I started to work I knew right away that I might just as well wear out the cord that tied my wrists as the one that tied me to the table, so I found a way I could move my hands so as to bring the cord out where I could make it touch the table leg. And then I began. And then suddenly a lucky thing happened, for I got off the box I was on, and slid down to the floor by the post, to work better, and there I found all at once that there was a nail sticking out a little from where a cross-piece was fastened between the table

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legs, and when I tried I found I could work the cord against it.

Well, it was awfully hard work, and I skinned the back of one of my wrists pretty bad, rubbing it against that nail sometimes when I got so tired that I couldn't keep the cord against it. But, really, I don't think it took me over five minutes to cut one place through the cord; and then, before I knew it, I felt it all loosen around my hands, and in a second I was free.

My hands ached like everything, you can just know, but I wouldn't wait to do anything to them then. When I got free Benedict was lying with his back to me, because he had twisted around that way, but he didn't seem to be any nearer getting away than ever. And I didn't dare go and let him free, either, for I was afraid of what he would do. Just as soon as he heard me, though, as I stepped on the floor, he turned over and looked up.

"You free?" he asked quickly, the first words I'd heard him say for ever so long.

"Yes," I answered.

"Here, then," he said, "help me. Untie these cords."

"I don't think I'd better," I answered. "I don't know what you would do."

"Do!" he exclaimed. "I'll help you get away. Untie these cords, and hurry up about it."

He was trying to scare me now, but I wasn't afraid, for I knew he was tied fast enough to last for a while, and I meant to try right then to get away by myself. I meant to try using the pole and jumping as far as I could over towards the cave entrance, and then swimming the rest of the way, just as I did when I got caught on the side of the pool. So I didn't pay any more attention to Benedict at all, but I just walked around him to the place where the pole stood and took it down.

It was heavy, and tipped over towards the pool, so that it was hard to keep it from falling over into the water again. And I had to carry it along the very edge of the pool to keep it from

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hitting the rocks above, till I could get to a place where I could try my plan,

Benedict spoke once or twice again, but he didn't move to try to get near me, and I was so interested in trying to handle the pole and watch him at the same time that I hardly heard what he said. But I went right on, taking the pole across the den; and when I got about the middle I rested an end on the den floor, and turned to see what sort of a chance I seemed to have to get across.

It seemed an awfully long ways over to that overhanging rock when I thought of trying to jump. I think I said it was twenty feet, but it might have been a good deal more. It was farther than I could jump even with the pole to help me, with the little start I had and with the pole leaning away from me at the beginning. For I had made up my mind to use the pole if I could, just as you do in the pole vault, only to make as wide a jump as I could and land as far over and as near the rocks as possible.

As I stood there thinking about it, I remembered that I didn't know whether any rocks might be in the way over there on that other side, except that I hadn't found any with the pole when I had poked around in the pool the first time. And I didn't know for sure that if I ever got across to the rocks the opening there would be big enough for me to get through. But I was sure that I couldn't hope for anything to help me unless I did try that way of escaping, so I just wouldn't think of anything but trying and getting out.

It was hard to make up my mind at the last, but, after I'd managed to take off my coat and my shoes, without letting go of the pole, I was ready. Benedict had watched me, without moving, till the last, but when he saw I was ready he suddenly spoke.

"If you let me loose before you try that," he said, "I can help you if you fail. I can pull you out if you don't succeed in making it."

That made me think, but I didn't dare trust him. "If I get out," I said, "I'll send somebody

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to help you. I'm going to get out, too," I added, because it made me afraid to try if I thought I might even possibly fail.

Well, I tried the pole on the edge of the rock, and then, when I knew it stood solid in a sort of little hollow, I drew two or three good long breaths, the way you do when you are going to try to swim under water, and then I just leaped up into the air and grabbed hold of the pole as high as I could, and in a second I was swinging out over the pool with only just the one chance that I could get away to the cave and out that way.

But the second I jumped I knew I'd made a good one, for I got up so well on the pole, and it turned and tipped so well and so straight with my weight, that I knew I'd started fine. And when I just threw my feet away out in front of me and just flung myself as hard as I could in a wide, wide jump, I could have yelled with my gladness over success, for I cleared as much as fourteen or sixteen feet of the distance before I struck the water.

Well, the jump gave me so much confidence that the second I was in the water I just threw myself through it, hand over hand, with the longest reaches I could make, and, before the cold had really made me feel it very much, I was under the overhanging rock, and next second I felt the edge of the under-water rocks over which the stream flowed, and knew I was safe.

I pulled myself up inside that cave, the gladdest fellow that ever lived, I guess, and though it was so dark, I just plunged in and hurried and hurried, splashing into the pools, bumping the walls, stepping on the sand when I could, but just trying to get out as quick as possible, for I knew that the cold of the water in my clothes might hurt me in there if I didn't.

It's a wonder I didn't get hurt, hurrying through the cave that way, but I seemed to remember the way mighty well, seeing I was only through it once before. I struck my foot once, awfully hard, against a rock, but I hardly knew it till I got outside. And then at last I saw the

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entrance ahead of me, and then I just ran for it, and out I went, staggering and pretty near falling, but just crazy to be free and see the sunlight and the woods and all.

But what do you think? The second I stepped out into the light I just saw a glimpse of something big and black near my right hand, and some big, powerful hands just reached down and grabbed hold of me and held me tight. And when I turned, just screaming with terror, I looked up square into a face I knew—the face of Captain Benson.

Talk about being surprised! I was never more so, even when I knew Morse in the den, I guess; but it was a glad surprise, I can tell you, and when I was sure who he was, I just grabbed him around the neck as if he was my father, and I guess I commenced to cry, too, because a while later I found out that I had been crying. But he just picked me up in his arms, and he stepped right out into the stream, hardly saying a word, but just holding me tight. And he waded right down

stream—for he had rubber hip-boots on—and climbed over the fallen logs, and down the little falls, and in a minute he had me on the grass-bank where Rick and I had stood when we first found his hat, after it came out through the cave.

Well, of course I was safe then, and all the questions I asked and he asked anybody can imagine. He made me undress quick, and stand in the sun, which was fine and warm, and then he took off his coat and wrapped it around me, and started down hill with me in his arms again. And then what do you think I found had happened? Captain Benson wasn't alone up there by a long ways. He had a lot of men with him, and they were all around in the woods, and in two minutes I found out that they had caught Morse, for they had been watching the cave and the big hole nearly all night, it seemed.

They had a launch down at the river, and I was carried right to it, and there I found Rick and Mr. Lally together. And there were a policeman and Morse, handcuffed to each other, and there

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were two of the other boys. And when they saw me everybody just yelled, as if they were glad, and I guess they were—except Morse. I guess he wasn't glad. And then I learned everything and told everything so quickly that I guess everybody must have talked at once.

Of course I wondered very much how they all happened to be there, but I had to tell my story first, and as soon as Captain Benson heard about Benedict lying bound in the cave, he took a rope from the launch and went back. And later they got to him all right and got him out. But the way they happened to hunt for me was so strange.

I hadn't thought anybody would be anxious about me at all, for several days, anyway, because of the letters Benedict had written and had made me write to Mr. Lally, and I guess it would have been quite a while, too, before either he or Aunt Margaret would have wondered where I was, but for one thing, and that was the counterfeit two-dollar bill. It was very queer, but it just happened that I had used that very bill to pay for the

feed and keeping of the pony at Frayne the day I was there. The fact that it was a counterfeit wasn't noticed at first, of course, but when the livery keeper went to put some money in the bank next day the bank people told him the two-dollar bill was bad.

Well, he remembered where he had got it, because it was the only two-dollar bill he had, and he knew I had been visiting Flora; so, as he happened to know Flora, he asked her about it right away that morning. And then all the rest had happened quickly, because Flora remembered my adventure with the negro. She called up the hotel at Little Fern, and tried to get me, and somebody who knew told her I had left the day before to go home to Aunt Margaret's. That startled her, and so she asked for Mr. Lally, and talked to him. And before they got through, Mr. Lally was so scared that he telegraphed to Aunt Margaret to ask if I was there, and then the whole thing came out. Rick told right away all about the cave and all, and that made them believe I must be up there,

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because the letters to Mr. Lally were false. And right in the middle of the excitement, in came Captain Benson, in answer to my letter and Flora's. The result of it all was that they had come just in time to the rocks, and had caught Morse and Benedict, and were ready to take care of me.

Well, that's about all of that adventure. The boat took us all back down to the lake to our camp, and there I found Flora, and even Aunt Margaret, waiting for me, and when we came in at the dock by the hotel, I guess all the resorters on Little Fern Lake were there, and they cheered and cheered. And, I tell you, the boys were interested, and I had to tell everybody over and over the whole story from beginning to end. And you can be pretty sure there wasn't anybody calling me Fido then.

Of course they sent Morse back to prison, and of course Benedict went, too, this time, though he went to a United States prison instead of the State penitentiary, because counterfeiting is break-

ing United States laws. And I guess neither one of them will get away. They never have caught either Castle or Vilas, for they both disappeared. But when I knew Morse was behind bars again, I felt safe once more, and, oh, so glad to be with my friends.

Father and mother didn't know anything about it all till they got back from England in September, because I asked Mr. Lally and Aunt Margaret not to let them hear. I knew mother would be awfully worried about me if they knew.

But it wasn't till I went back to St. Croix in the fall that we ever flew the kite we made out of newspapers that first day we learned that Morse had escaped, and after flying it just once I wouldn't any more, for I was afraid we might lose it some time. And so I put it away and kept it. And I've got it yet, too.

Of course we have visited the cave in the Little Fern Valley lots of times since. People had been there before, you know, but somehow it had happened that nobody had ever known of the cave or

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thought anything much about the pool till Rick and I found out about it. And once we took a lot of fishlines and a weight with us to measure the depth of the pool. The men had told me it was bottomless, you know, but anybody knows any pool like that must have some bottom somewhere, no matter how deep it may be. And we found a bottom, too, but I tell you it scared me before we did find it, for that pool was eighty-two feet deep from the edge of the den floor. And now people go there, lots of them, every summer, to see the place; and because of the things that happened there, and because the water is so deep, they call it "The Cave of the Bottomless Pool."

THE END

By HENRY GARDNER HUNTING

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